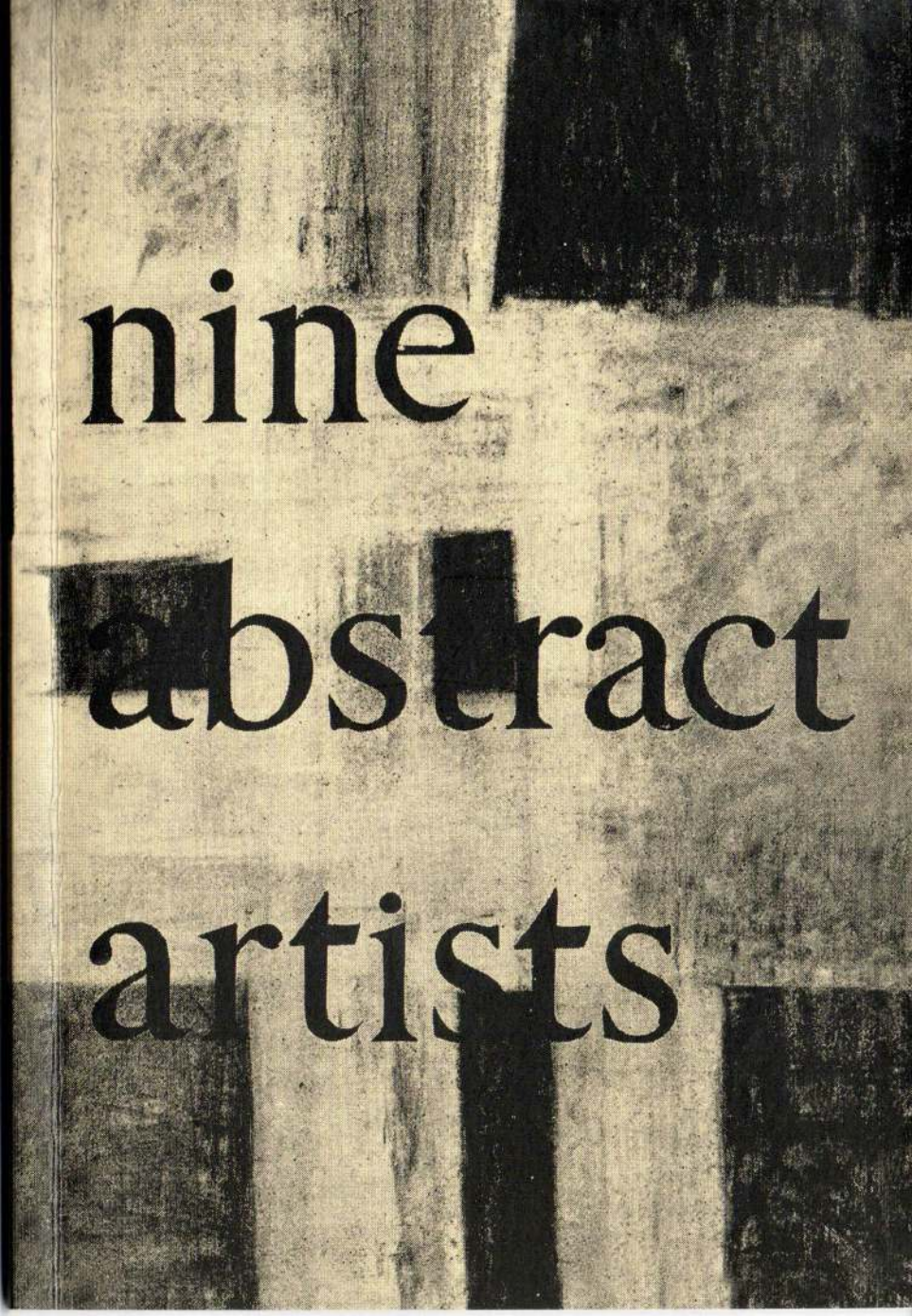
nine
abstract
artists

NINE ABSTRACT ARTISTS

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their work and theory

ROBERT ADAMS ■ TERRY FROST ■ ADRIAN HEATH
ANTHONY HILL ■ ROGER HILTON ■ KENNETH MARTIN
MARY MARTIN ■ VICTOR PASMORE ■ WILLIAM SCOTT

LAWRENCE ALLOWAY

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Adrian Heath: Roger Mayne 15 ; A. C. Cooper 16,17,18,19.

Anthony Hill: Arthur Dawson 20,24,25 ; Michael Wickham 22 ; Charles White 21,23.

Kenneth Martin: P. Hunot 32,33,36 ; F. J. Woodford 34,37 ; A. Baer 35.

Mary Martin: A. C. Cooper.

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British non-figurative art[1] before World War II had strong international connections. Unit One, formed in 1933, was described in a group-publication of the following year as 'the modern movement in English architecture, painting, and sculpture.'[2] Sir Herbert Read pointed out that, unlike the 'isolated' Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, Unit One's 'consciousness is international.' Literature, exhibitions, and travel abroad[3] made the group aware of what Paul Nash called 'the lack of structural purpose' in English art. Nash said of the group: 'What they stand for is decidedly at variance with the great Unconscious School of Painting. Also they seem to be lacking in reverence for Nature as such.'[4] They preferred 'Design . . . considered as a structural pursuit; imagination, explored apart from literature or metaphysics.' To quote Nash once more: 'It cannot be said that all these artists produce "abstract" art, or that they are all interested in an architectonic quality principally, although this, perhaps, is a common pursuit with the majority.'

'Design,' 'architectonic quality': the words are familiar. The clear, sturdy, pervasiveness of the terms connote a Universal similar to that of critics like Fry and Wilenski, who believed in a kind of pure core, without excrescences, probably colourless, at the heart of great art and modern art. Wadsworth in his statement for *Unit One* wrote: 'Painting is a technique for the expression of Universals.' Ben Nicholson, after reading Sir Arthur Eddington, wrote: 'painting and religious experience are the same.' Commenting on Nicholson's aesthetic, Read observed that 'the work of art that can express such a transcendental quality must of necessity be far removed from the mundane world of actual appearances.' There the platonic drift of abstract aesthetic is summed up: geometry is the means to a high world.

After 1933, important figures of the international movement were forced out of Europe by political conditions. Gropius, Breuer, Moholoy-Nagy, Gabo and, later than the others and only briefly, Mondrian were in England. In 1937, after several ambitious exhibitions of non-figurative art *Circle*[5] was published with words and pictures by the distinguished refugees and the more cosmopolitan of the British artists. The Bauhaus ideal of 'cultural unity' underlay the book, the expression of the need for a total form-sense, not just a painting-sense. This lavish book was projected as an annual but it was never followed up, and it stands like one pylon on the downs. Nevertheless *Circle* (and what it stands for) is significant in relation to post-war British art.[6]

The third publication which should be mentioned is AXIS.[7] It began in 1935 as 'a quarterly review of contemporary "abstract" painting and sculpture,' translating into English the quasi-classical principles of the *Abstraction-Création* group.[8] However, it was marked by a romantic flavour which increased in 1937 with articles on pre-history from the air (by rescinded abstractionist John Piper) and on England as a beach along which Paul Nash was walking.

In addition to romantic elements rising, most of the refugees departed as England failed to support the international movement. Gabo stayed, and through him the grand pre-war mode made itself felt, though not necessarily directly. His influence at St. Ives, for example, was strangely incorporated by Barbara Hepworth. The romantic accent of the later AXIS grew thicker in the war, both among the official war-artists (Sutherland, Nash, Piper) and among the new generation (Vaughan, Craxton, Minton). Both the loyal men and the dreamy boys developed an imagery of landscape which implied a kind of dark, meditative patriotism. The sceptred isle became an armoured womb.

In the fifties, none of the pre-war British artists are important for non-figurative art: they have either become

romantics or, like Nicholson and Hepworth, at least tired of their thirtyish purity. A pattern of conversions has been established—with Victor Pasmore as culture-hero. When he gave up his personal and subtle realism he was motivated, at least in part, by a desire to revive and continue the principles of the international movement which had disappeared under the foliage and chiaroscuro of the romantics. He painted his first abstraction in 1947, his first paper *collage* is dated 1948, and in 1951 he made his first constructions. Kenneth Martin followed Pasmore's example, making his first non-figurative painting in 1949 and his first mobile in 1951. Adrian Heath, who had been influenced by Pasmore's Euston Road realism, changed his style in 1950. Mary Martin's first non-figurative painting was 1950, her first relief sculpture the following year. Roger Hilton painted for years in ways picked up from Paris and invested with romantic overtones. It was not until the late forties that he made a personal style. Anthony Hill was a dada-ist, but adopted strict non-figuration in 1950. Robert Adams did not change as the result of a sudden, striking precedent : the human figure haunted his work, as in the series of vertical constructions of 1948-9. After that the physical identity of his materials asserted their autonomy and abolished the last head and the last torso. William Scott has also changed, not suddenly, but gradually. He has gone from a stylised realism to a more highly abstracted style in which tables and figures are residual presences, rather than clear signs. The decisive nature of Scott's change became clear in 1953.

Pasmore is important : the Martins, Heath, Hill, Adams, have been associated with him. These artists are, roughly speaking, the ones who pick up the intentions and character of *Circle*. Scott, Hilton, and Frost (and Alan Davie who is not in this book) represent the other extreme of non-figurative art —irrational expression by *malerisch* means. Since the war, non-figurative art has flourished in Europe and America, both as a field for academic study and as the scene of new creative

work.[9] The two activities are complementary. The 'Pasmore group' should be compared with Max Bill[10] and Richard P. Lohse,[11] both of the Zurich group, and with the Americans Ritchie calls 'pure geometric,'[12] such as Diller, Glarner, and Lippold. The other artists belong to the painterly abstractionists who melt, bury, or fracture platonic geometry. There is a stylistic gamut from expressionistic action painting[13] to a kind of sensual impressionism without things. It is in this free style that the majority of British non-figurative artists, who are not in this book, work.[14]

It has been assumed in much 20th century aesthetics that 'it is in our modern architecture . . . that the classical spirit has manifested itself most widely! The preëminently orderly and rational character of the International Style . . . etc.'[15] The basic or eternal part of works of art is supposed to be 'architectonic quality' and thus real architecture is fallaciously supposed to be the receptacle of 'the classical spirit' which, please note, manifests itself. This confusion is the link which relates Unit One's taste for the Absolute with the International Style. What is important in modern architecture seem to be just those qualities of mass-production, flexible planning, and movement which make any ideal canon inconceivable. Kandinsky believed that art was something pure and constant that was flawed by personal style and dated by history. According to Mondrian[16] 'a work of art is only "art" in so far as it establishes life in its unchangeable aspect: as pure vitality.' In both cases fixed ends of ultimate value are assumed. The word is used in another sense by Gabo who describes shapes whose 'content lies in themselves'[17] as absolute.

These obstinate absolutes,[18] being inherent in language and, hence, in thinking, obtrude constantly. Hilton, for example, says that 'in the last resort a painter is a seeker after truth.' But he also believes 'he is like a man swinging out into the void.' The latter sentence implies existential man making

himself in the present by his actions, whereas the former sentence suggests an antiquated pilgrim. Pasmore began by thinking in terms of absolutes but in his later theory he has moved from eternity to here. Terry Frost is undeterred by absolutes: 'Universal emotion: Rembrandt; the big moral emotions, sorrow, poverty, blindness, understood by all nationalities and creeds. One can create universal emotions of forms.'[19] Frost is thinking of forms as having absolute physiological effects.

It is essential to distinguish between 'absolute' as a mystical class of fixed ends and 'absolute' as concrete. The problem of concretion is at the heart of non-figurative art, but the other 'absolute' is the skeleton in the cupboard. A basic concern of modern artists is with the status of the work of art itself. This question has been raised in various forms by different schools but with especial cogency by non-figurative artists. The development of Victor Pasmore illustrates the point.[20] His art has evolved from being a window onto 'nature' through an elliptical sign-language, to the picture-as-an-object. Underlying Pasmore's development is the fundamental problem of the inter action of the various levels of abstraction and autonomy.

Other artists differ from the position of Pasmore and the Martins and Hill, and consider non-figurative art to be basically the same as figurative art. Ben Nicholson[21] believes that it is all the same: 'slightly more or slightly less abstract is for me beside the point.' What he likes is a 'poetic expression' with 'astonishing beauty,' 'superb organisation,' 'rhythm,' and 'intensity.' If you excavate a Raphael or a Masaccio, apparently, you come on the pure plastic elements. Currently many artists still believe in the constant, not of order, now, but of disorder — vitality, a sense of energy, the id. As far as William Scott is concerned, magic is where you find it—in primitive art, or in concrete art. Its nature is imponderable; it is basically another absolute, a dark instead of a bright one.

A work of art is given the status of an object in its own right by the existential strategy or by the strategy of purity. If the painter discards all points of abstraction and yet paints in an expressionistic way, the painting can be read as the sum of his actions. The painting is the result of a unique encounter of an artist and his materials. The artist is a man painting, not a man using paint for an extra-artistic purpose. Hilton and Scott represent the style in this book, not at its purest but fairly clearly. Art can also assert autonomy by an emphasis on inherent relationships which are satisfactory enough to make the work complete in itself. The intention is to create a work that is free of the distraction of external referents. High finish may also emphasise a work's status as an object.

This conception of concrete art (whether wild or severe) has altered the conception of space.[22] Hilton has described the way in which his paintings are designed to act on the surrounding space. He achieves this by a scattering of his configurations and by placing colours so that they look like parts of larger bodies outside the picture area. In Scott's best pictures the vibration of tones is not that of one colour overlapping another but the relationship of areas of paint on a stretched plane. This basic plane should not be regarded as merely a carrier of 'flat-pattern': the surface is space as a fluid, continuous medium. As Hilton expresses it: 'real paint on real canvas . . . will be arranged, not in just any harmonious order, but in such a way as not to interrupt the flow of space.'

A marginal but significant problem raised by concrete art is that of titling.[23] Many concrete artists have trouble with this because of the differences between verbal meaning and works in which the form is meant to be the content. There can be (1) no title, (2) numbers, (3) descriptive titles, (4) titles referring to images found in the act of painting, (5) titles referring to the picture's point of departure, and (6) poetic titles. The first three categories emphasise art in its con-

creteness and so, up to a point, does the fourth. The fifth and last categories, however, stress abstraction from an external object. Hilton does not give his paintings names. Hill, Heath, the Martins, Frost, and Pasmore use descriptive titles (such as *Rectangular Motif: White, Black, Brown, Ochre*). Scott's *Figure into Landscape* refers to what happened in the process of painting itself, thus referring to the fourth category. Frost often gives an evocative flavour to his descriptive titles, such as *Corsham: Black and Silver,* which borders on the sixth category. Some of Pasmore's titles echo Whistlerian aestheticism, by stressing pure formal elements in a slightly seductive way. On the whole, the nine artists represented here avoid the wordy and associative titles.

Artists have different attitudes towards theory. To some of them art emerges silently from a pre-verbal level of the mind. Others believe that a whole man expresses himself by producing both art-works and texts. Hill, with his accumulation of statements and arguments, is the conspicuous example of this type, but Pasmore and Kenneth Martin belong here, too. Martin has written very little but his statements, when they come, are carefully laid out defences of his current art. Pasmore's words and art relate in a somewhat similar way, combining the creative and the critical, the instinctual and the didactic. On one hand, there is Pasmore as an artist of exceptional painterly gifts; on the other hand, is the theorist whose cerebration transcends the artist's native accomplishments. A desire to evaluate as well as to create art works leads him to scrutinise his art as it comes into being.

One of the admirable things about Pasmore is that he constantly remakes his career. Each phase of his activity alters the significance of what went before. This is expressed by the lingering revisions to which he subjects his work, which seem to be revaluations rather than a fulfilment of the original intention. He has elected to oppose what he can do most easily. It is in an effort to define himself and his heroically

motivated constructivism that he makes his statements—investigating himself.

In 1949 Pasmore wrote : ' the condition to which " abstract " painting aspires is a condition closer to music than has hitherto been possible.'[24] This statement is in line with the Gauguin-Kandinsky theories of subjective and irrational art. However, there are two sides to the musical analogy and Pasmore took advantage of its ambiguity : music is (1) associative and irrational, (2) structural. Gradually the second term predominates in Pasmore's theory and he compares geometric form specifically to notes in music : ' the painter who uses such forms must proceed, like the musician, from a limited scale to a complex construction ' whereas ' the visual painter . . . proceeds by a method of abstraction from the complex to the limited.'[25] Then he decided that *painted* triangles, rectangles, and spirals were not the most direct way of handling concrete elements, however, and he devoted himself to *collages,* constructions of actual objects—pieces of cardboard, wallpaper, and newspaper.

In 1951 Pasmore was decisively influenced by Charles Biederman, a constructivist aesthetician in America.[26] His massive book *Art as the Evolution of Visual Knowledge* is a comprehensive interpretation of world-art as a process culminating, inevitably, in constructivism—or, rather, in Biederman's version. Though Pasmore later disagreed with Biederman on many points,[27] this book, coming when it did, confirmed Pasmore's drift towards constructivism.

Biederman defined constructivism as ' the first Realistic Art of Man, in the sense that it is not an illusion of something else.' But he criticised constructivists like Gabo, Pevsner, and Vantongerloo, who have jumped prematurely from the two-dimensional paintings of Mondrian and Malevitch to three-dimensional forms in actual space.[28] Biederman argues in favour of relief-sculpture as the moderate sculptural extension of Mondrian now possible. It is roughly within these limits

that Pasmore has worked, though his sense of order is more impressionistic and dramatic than Biederman's and he has permitted himself various marginal experiments.

Ozenfant's point that 'our senses are accustomed to scenes where geometry reigns'[29] because ours is a technological age applies to Pasmore :

> Today the painter and sculptor would be expected to utilise machine technology only as a result of two demands: (1) that he has conceived new ideas which cannot be effectively expressed in any other way, or (2) that contact with machine-craft and machine-made materials have infected him with a new feeling for form and new ideas appropriate to his form. There can be no question of the old ideas or the old forms of painting and sculpture being directed into the sphere of machine technology except as a transitional step. Machine-craft is appropriate only to its own forms.[30]

Pasmore's reliefs of plastics and metals belong in the second category. However, his art is, to use his own term, 'transitional.' He points out that 'the machine can produce new types of form which the hand cannot adequately or effectively construct.' Equally, hand-craft forms are not suitable for machine-production. This is the case of the reliefs : they are indulgent and brilliant *unique* art objects, made by hand. Though he calls his reliefs prototypes his technique of assembling is done with the flair of a painter, not with the functional economy of an architect or designer. Pasmore has set himself up as Anti-Morris but, in fact, his failure to rely on industrial technique of assembly with standardised components has a belated Arts and Crafts individualism.[31]

In fact, Pasmore has realised some of the ambiguities of his argument, for he now points out a connection between his late impressionistic river scenes and his plastic reliefs.[32] The constructions are built to catch the light in ways that are inherent in the refractive, translucent, and transparent materials he uses. Thus the effects of light that Pasmore painted on the Thames are now expressed in concrete form. The industrial reference is present, but only like Ozenfant's geometry, or in the fact that the reliefs are multi-valued because each light-change alters the apparent structure of the reliefs.

Definitions depend on a consciousness of similarities in differences and differences in similarities. From one point of view, these nine artists have a great deal in common. Despite personal differences, most of them resist 'the distraction of the external' in their desire for concretion and most of them conceive of space as an open, continuous medium. Several of them are concerned with ideas of technology (Pasmore, Kenneth Martin, and Hill), and others have a tendency to lean on the absolute standards which are the bane of non-figurative theory. From another point of view, these nine artists are different from each other, even within the areas of comparison: they offer individual solutions to the common problems and different personalities and gifts choose different means.

Roger Hilton has said of art works that 'ideally they should be a kind of anonymous presence.'[33] In his paintings the consequences of this decision may be seen. He makes lean, flat, minimal forms in a narrow range of oil colours that come straight from the tube. His earlier work had a sensuous disorder: light glowed and ripe fruit splashed in an overgrown Klee-garden. Then he adopted a sombre tonal range in which patches of rich colour were embedded in black chiaroscuro, with strong emotive connotations. Now Hilton has abolished the pictorial use of light and gives to his flat forms a bland uniform complexion. His forms are rather like dried-out biomorphs of Arp: they no longer have juice in them, and their movement has been canalised into an unassociative expanding space. Hilton says that 'the abstract painter submits himself entirely to the unknown.' He means, by this, that it is the act of painting that makes the painting. The artist cannot rehearse his work, for the finished work would be different from any sketch, and he cannot judge his work by any canon (such as that supplied by mathematics). His irregular forms are subsumed by a space which is itself substance and which thus robs the forms of volume. Background and foreground distinctions are obliterated in successful pieces by Hilton.

Hilton's forms have wandering edges but they give a feeling of fortitude. Adrian Heath, on the other hand, works with geometrical forms and uses—to a point, at least—harmonic proportions. The effect of his paintings is, however, fairly undisciplined. Heath, like other associates of Pasmore, has written about non-figurative art from an historical and not overtly personal viewpoint.[34] However, his praise of somebody whom he calls 'the least doctrinaire of painters' helps to explain his own mixture of geometry and improvised complexity:

> It can be seen that Magnelli does not share with the Neo-plastic painters an ambition to destroy particular form. He is content to free it from representational significance. . . Frequently he cultivates the illusion of tactile solidity and allows his forms to exist in an undefined space.

Some of Heath's pictures are organised to give a sense of an advancing picture-plane, but on the whole his tendency is towards a recessed space. He handles particular forms, defined by casual contours and spirited textures, in a shallow atmospheric space.

One way or another romantic elements appear in non-figurative art. William Scott describes the way in which a picture grows as he works in a way reminiscent of Dylan Thomas' method of writing a poem, one image begetting another image.[35] Scott, like Hilton, is devoted to the unknown, the 'indefinable.' This emphasis on change and the thrill is romantic. Scott's paintings are the only ones in this book abstracted from the human figure or still-life and in most cases the process is pushed to a point of near-concretion.[36] If his point of departure is a woman, the torso is flattened and the head may resemble a coffee pot on a vertical table-plane. Or, conversely, a coffee pot on the table may almost become a head. Thus signs tend to become interchangeable by their translation into the physical terms of paint and canvas. There is no paraphrasable meaning in Scott's new work, only a meaning dependent on the act of painting. The taut lines of

his paintings refer sufficiently to objects to give an ominous evocative note to the minimal images, but not enough to impair the integrity of the canvas. By flattening form the picture plane is preserved as a continuous surface. Unlike Heath who elaborates paint sensuously and Hilton who is ascetic about it, Scott's paint skin is rich without being ornamental and space-making without being thin. The different densities of his paint build up an advancing (rather than a receding) picture-plane. Such pictures are different from flat-pattern works because of the active thrust forwards, from behind the picture as it were, combined with radiating as opposed to centralised compositions.

In St. Ives they combine non-figurative theory with the practice of abstraction because the landscape is so nice nobody can quite bring themselves to leave it out of their art. The generalised horizon-line or a particular rock, a mine or a climb, is always present to a greater or lesser degree of abstraction. Terry Frost, more than anyone else in this book, has been influenced by St. Ives. He has described how he draws his paintings out of nature. His intuitive way of working is in line with Kandinsky who thought that emotion in the artist produced an art-work which then produced emotion in the observer : ' the two emotions will be like and equivalent to the extent that the work of art is successful.'

> In order that the inner element, which at first exists only as an emotion, may develop into a work of art, the second element, i.e., the outer, is used as an embodiment. Emotion is always seeking means of expression, a material form, a form that is able to stir the sense. The determining and vital element is the inner one, which controls the outer form, just as an idea in the mind determines the words we use, and not *vice versa*.[37]

There are objections to this notion, however. There are no laws according to which painted forms can be made to transmit fixed emotions. The determining of the outer element by the inner element means, in effect, that anything goes. It is possible to abstract indiscriminately from the contours of static forms, the temporal existence of forms in motion, from forms expressionistically deformed, and so on. In this kind of

painting any eccentricity can be justified by reference to the inner element, emotion, which Kandinsky, of course, related to the 'soul.' A great deal depends in this kind of painting on the tact with which the different levels are unified and to what extent the observer feels he feels an emotional tone holding everything together.

An analogy between non-figurative art and music has already been referred to. An analogy between sculpture and concrete art also exists. The sculptor's basic condition is that he is working with something that has a pronounced status as a piece of raw material: thus the concrete artists in their struggle to deny oil paint its habitual descriptive function look longingly at sculpture. Scott has produced sculpture for years currently with his paintings and Pasmore and Kenneth and Mary Martin have gone over to three-dimensions.

Kenneth Martin's first concrete paintings were of a slightly disordered geometry, reminiscent of *collages* assembled by dirty hands. They were smudged and atmospheric and the rectangles were set in lively relationships by small departures from horizontal and vertical axes. But he considered that concretion was only partially achieved by painting—even with anti-platonic geometry. 'The new artist has been given the means to create a new object, instead of the appearance of an object, and to organise real space, instead of illusional space.'[38] This was written when Martin gave up painting and devoted himself to mobiles and hanging sculpture. He has opposed the Calder type of mobile with its spirit of surrealist fantasy and surprise. His pieces are developments of forms in space, the proportions of a basic form being subtly extended. What is important about mobiles is that they have to be apprehended temporally. The simple and logical components of Martin's mobiles move in time with an exceptional clarity owing to their freedom from allusions to larks or flying saucers. He conveys a sense of proportionate forms fulfilling themselves in motion.

The relief sculptures of Mary Martin were arrived at by a process of extrapolation similar to that of Kenneth Martin. In modern architecture and sculpture solids can be dissolved by the use of new materials : the base is no longer a necessity for sculpture and form can be more open than at any previous time.[39] Her first relief was based on a columbarium but her later pieces are purely mathematical variations of the theme of the little boxes and no birds are expected. This mathematical basis means that a perpetual extension of the spiral, climbing, or expanding motives is theoretically possible (there seems to be a link with Le Corbusier's extensible square spiral museum). In fact, most of the reliefs are centred on a basic plane, but this is only a display-device. Mary Martin's advancing planes and hollowed blocks are based on the right-angle (except for the tilted planes which are viewed in elevation only). The pale tones and unemphatic forms provide a mild chiaroscuro reminiscent of Ben Nicholson's best works, his pure white reliefs of the thirties. She has produced ten of these reliefs in four years : she combines a continuity of development with a firmness of definition in each work which is very impressive.

The attitude of sculptors towards their materials has undergone some changes lately. It was a tenet of Moore and Hepworth, for example, to work ' in the nature of the materials.' There is much to be said for this because different materials have different physical properties. However, there was a tendency to anthropomorphise certain materials, in sculpture and architecture. Marcel Breuer satirised those West Coast Americans by whom ' human is considered identical with redwood all over the place.'[40] The main tendency now is against investing sculptural materials with inherent virtues. The regional-organic has been replaced by the quasi-technological assembly methods of the Bauhaus : for example, the plastics of Pasmore, the blocks of wood coated with plastic emulsion

paint of Mary Martin, and Kenneth Martin's strips of sheet metal.

Robert Adams is exceptional among the younger sculptors in that he is not only an assembler (wire sculpture) and a modeller but also a carver. However, though he began under the influence of Moore and Hepworth his wooden sculptures are not dryads : his wood is not from the grove at Nemi. A motive he has explored is a *divided column* which is rather like a tower on *piloti.* Angular or curved blocks are arranged in storeys that read as a spiral movement : solids are lightened by being perforated and separated from each other by pegs. Thus the surrounding space is brought into active relation with the volumes, without loosening the central form. This kind of equilibrium is characteristic of his best work. (Parallel with his later non-figurative sculpture Adams has made admirable *collages* of a crisp, clear, severity.)

Anthony Hill admires Max Bill and has sympathetically interpreted Bill's desire to apply ' the principle of concrete art . . . throughout the entire visual plastic domain.'[41] Hill himself is purely a painter and thus cannot express by a comprehensive plastic activity a basic unity of design. However, it is his strategy to extend concrete art by relating it to the whole of art by means of argument. Discourse, like Bill's applied design, spreads the concrete principle over a wider area than art reaches directly. Hill's statement in this book, for example, opens out like clear rings around the concrete art-works that he drops in the muddy water of 20th-century aesthetics.

Hill's central effort in painting (despite marginal experiments) is against what he calls ' nonchalance.' He prefers a ' precision ' which is expressed by a dead-pan surface treatment that opposes Jackson Pollock's ' personal handwriting idea.'[42] His earlier concrete works were crowded with particular forms, but even then he usually avoided illusory space. Now, his compositions have a mathematical basis and a much

simpler presentation of stronger motives. The rigid economy and compulsive technique have, apart from their intrinsic vitality, an international flavour, an efficiency nourished on a sound knowledge of non-figurative history and theory.

To sum up : this book covers the recent work of nine non-figurative artists. It was not my idea to collect these reproductions and statements together—the first move was made by the artists concerned. They do not constitute a movement, though six of the nine do belong to a single, loosely-knit group. This book, therefore, is not fully representative of British non-figuration since the war.[43] It does, however, present a fair proportion of the best artists. On the whole, British non-figurative art stands apart from the prevailing British style which continues to be a form of nature-romanticism. Even the post-war generation of sculptors is predominately romantic, with its emphasis on sensation and metamorphosis.

Footnotes to Text.

1. It is essential that I define my terms. Most people agree that the term *abstract* is misleading. Alfred H. Barr, Jr. (*Cubist and Abstract Art,* New York 1936) pointed out what was wrong with the word but continued to use it. This decision is typical of many writers: at random—John I. H. Baur (*Revolution and Tradition in Modern American Art,* Harvard 1952) repeats Barr; Frances Bradshaw Blanshard (*Retreat from Likeness in the Theory of Painting,* New York 1949) wanders over the ground at more length. Herbert Read (AXIS, No. 1, 1935) wrote: '*Abstract* has a cousinship with the term "absolute," and both terms suggest a surplus of intellectual values which exist in abstract painting, and for this reason alone I feel that the term "abstract" is fully justified.' This abstract-absolute tie-up, on the contrary, seems to me unsatisfactory. I propose to use *abstract* meaning to *draw out of* or *away from.* Figure paintings and landscapes will be said to have been abstracted from figures and landscapes. The word *concrete* will be used for works of art in which a process of abstraction is not perceptible—that is, for paintings without external reference. Also, I should add that I am aware of logical objections to the term *non-figurative,* but at least it is harder to misunderstand than *abstract.* It is used here as an inclusive term for the whole field.
2. *Unit One,* Ed.: Herbert Read, London 1934.
3. *Barbara Hepworth, Carvings and Drawings,* London 1952. See Note 2 for English artists in Paris studios in the early thirties.
4. Paul Nash, letter to THE TIMES, June 1933 (quoted in *Unit One*).
5. *Circle, an International Survey of Constructivist Art,* Eds.: J. L. Martin, Ben Nicholson, Naum Gabo, London 1937.
6. Apart from English manifestations of the International Style, an exhibition at the Zwemmer Gallery, March-April 1934 is now seen to have some historical importance. Geoffrey Tibble, Rodrigo Moynihan, Claude Rogers, Graham Bell, Victor Pasmore, and others exhibited under the group title 'Objective Abstractionists.' David Gascoyne in a contemporary review referred to 'impressionism applied to non-figurative subjects' and 'abstraction built purely from colour and light.' This painterly style was opposed to Unit One and prefigured post-war style. The movement, however, was abortive.
7. AXIS, A QUARTERLY REVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY 'ABSTRACT' PAINTING AND SCULPTURE, eight numbers January 1935 to early Winter 1937).

8. See ABSTRACTION, CREATION, ART NON-FIGURATIF, Paris 1932—, published by l'association abstraction-creation, founded 1931.
9. See, for example, ART D'AUJOURD'HUI, Paris, ARTI VISIVE, Rome, among journals; Michel Seuphor, *L'Art Abstrait,* Paris 1949; for American abstract art—Thomas B. Hess, *Abstract Painting: Background and American Phase,* New York 1951: A. C. Ritchie, *Abstract Painting and Sculpture in America,* New York 1951.
10. Anthony Hill, *Max Bill* (TYPOGRAPHICA 7).
11. Richard P. Lohse, *A Revised Thematics for Progressive Art* (TRANSFORMATION 1 No. 3, New York 1952).
12. See Ritchie, *op. cit.*
13. Harold Rosenburg, *The American Action Painters* (ART NEWS 52, No.8, New York 1952). Michel Tapié, *Un art autre,* Paris 1952.
14. For a list of names see *British Abstract Art,* exhibition catalogue Gimpel Fils, London, August 1951. TYPOGRAPHICA 4, contains one of the earliest assessments of revived British non-figurative art: Toni del Renzio, *First Principles and Last Hopes.*
15. John I. H. Baur, *op. cit.*
16. Piet Mondrian, *Plastic Art and Pure Plastic Art,* New York 1945.
17. Naum Gabo, article in *Circle,* London 1937.
18. See Reyner Banham, *On Abstract Theory* (ART NEWS AND REVIEW, London vol. V. No. 22, Nov. 1953) for an exposure of the roots of abstract aesthetic in nineteenth century academism. In a talk in a series of seminars on Aesthetic Problems of Contemporary Art at the Institute of Contemporary Art, London 1954, Banham quoted Rowe (ART BULLETIN vol. 35, No. 2, June 1953) for his definition of academic aesthetics as resting on the assumption of 'continuously present, underlying, and rational principles.'
19. Terry Frost, *What I Think Today* (in PENWICH SOCIETY BROADSHEET, No. 4, summer 1953).
20. See Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, exhibition catalogue: *Victor Pasmore, 1944-1954,* 1954.
21. Ben Nicholson, *Notes on Abstract Art* (HORIZON, vol. IV, No. 22, 1941).
22. Piet Mondrian, *op. cit.* see p. 19—20.
23. For a discussion of titling practice, see *Modern Artists in America,* first series, New York 1951, pp. 14—16. Most of the artists in this book make up the names when they are going to have an exhibition or when their works are about to be reproduced. They tend to forget their titles. Some of Pasmore's work since 1948 has been exhibited and reproduced under different titles.

24. *Abstract Art, comments by some Artists and Critics* selected by Victor Pasmore (privately printed, London 1949). This anthology is catholic, containing quotations from Leonardo and Léger, Focillon and Fry, Breton and Poussin, Seurat and Whistler, as well as Malevitch, Mondrian, and Gabo. It begins with Plato and ends with C. E. M. Joad asserting that 'Beauty is an objective reality.' The artist's own copy contains much additional material of a later date. There are quotations from Klee, Arp, Van Doesburg, Vantongerloo, Pevsner, Herbin, Gabo, Bill, and Biederman. There is a greater stress on concretion and technology.
25. Victor Pasmore, *The Artist Speaks* (ART NEWS AND REVIEW vol. III, No. 2, February 1951).
26. Charles Biederman, *Art as the Evolution of Visual Knowledge,* Red Wing (Minn.) 1948.
27. 1953, unpublished correspondence with Biederman.
28. Charles Biederman, *Letters on the New Art,* Red Wing (Minn.) 1951.
29. Amédée Ozenfant (and Jeanneret), *La Peinture moderne,* Paris 1924.
30. Victor Pasmore, *Painting, Sculpture and Modern Mechanization.* Lecture given at the School of Art, Glasgow 1953.
31. For a succint definition of an art employing technology see John McHale (Statement from 'Artist v. Machine' exhibition at the Building Centre, London 1954): 'Industrial practice provides; mass-produced materials; standardised components. These suggest "concrete" usage in their own terms of surface, structural performance, technique of assembly.'
32. See I.C.A. Exhibition Catologue, *op. cit.*
33. Unpublished writing by the artist (1953-1954).
34. Adrian Heath, *Abstract Painting, its Origins and Meaning,* London 1953.
35. Kandinsky used the term concrete to describe his later paintings (XX SIECLE, 5—6, Paris 1939). Kenneth Martin thinks, since stopping painting, that two-dimensional concrete art is thin, and considers constructivism its logical outcome. However, I use concrete in connection with Scott's latest paintings because the image is sometimes lost in paint, which seems the prime concern.
36. Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art,* New York 1947 (1st. edn. 1912).
37. Kenneth Martin, *An Art of Environment* (BROADSHEET 2, 1952).

38. See L. Moholy-Nagy, *The New Vision*, London 1939, for this line of thought about sculpture.
39. Marcel Breuer, ARTS AND ARCHITECTURE, May 1948, Los Angeles. From a statement made during a Museum of Modern Art symposium, February 1948.
40. See Hill, *op. cit.*
41. Anthony Hill, unpublished writings, 1953.
42. For another choice of artists, see ARTI VISIVE, 6—7, Rome 1953.

THE ARTISTS

Robert Adams, Rosslyn Studios, Pilgrims Lane, Hampstead, London N.W.3
Terry Frost, c/o Alec Tiranti Ltd.
Adrian Heath, 22 Fitzroy Street, London W.1
Anthony Hill, 4 Hunter Street, London W.C.1
Roger Hilton, 10 St. Anne's Road, London W.11
Kenneth Martin, 9 Eaton Avenue, London N.W.3
Mary Martin, 9 Eaton Avenue, London N.W.3
Victor Pasmore, 12 St. German's Place, London S.E.3
William Scott, 12 Editha Mansions, Edith Grove, London S.W.10

Correction:
Terry Frost
c/o Leicester Galleries
Leicester Square, London, W.C.

Printed by Suttons of Paignton

ROBERT ADAMS

SCULPTOR AND DESIGNER; WORKED IN WOOD, STONE, METAL, LITHOGRAPHY AND COLLAGE. INSTRUCTOR AT THE CENTRAL SCHOOL OF ARTS AND CRAFTS, LONDON, SINCE 1949. STUDIED AT NORTHAMPTON SCHOOL OF ART. EXHIBITED IN LONDON, PARIS, NEW YORK, VENICE, BRAZIL, ROME, MILAN, ANTWERP, IRELAND. INTERNATIONAL BIENNALES —BRAZIL 1951, ANTWERP 1951-1953, VENICE 1952, HOLLAND PARK, LONDON 1954, FESTIVAL OF BRITAIN, TATE GALLERY. WORKS IN PERMANENT COLLECTIONS—ARTS COUNCIL, BRITISH COUNCIL, MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, NEW YORK, NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY, MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, TURIN, SAO PAULO MUSEUM, UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN, ANN ARBOR. WORKS REPRODUCED—*ART D'AUJOURD'HUI*, PARIS, *HARPERS, HOUSE AND GARDEN, ART NEWS*—NEW YORK, *THE LISTENER, ILLUSTRATED*. PUBLICATIONS—*TWENTIETH CENTURY SCULPTURE* (PLEIADES, LONDON), *SCULPTURE OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY* (MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, NEW YORK), *CONTEMPORARY BRITISH ART* (PELICAN, LONDON), *SCULPTURE; THEMES AND VARIATIONS* (LUND HUMPHRIES, LONDON).

How do you begin a work?

Usually for me one work leads on from another, perhaps as a variation on the same idea, or sometimes the material that I happen to be using may suggest a different idea. I then make rough drawings to find out if it will work as sculpture.

What preferences have you, if any, in materials and why?

I have no preference in materials. For the non-figurative sculptor this must always be so, because the material is synonymous with the idea, and one must therefore conceive the idea in terms of the material. Materials are of greater importance in non-figurative than in figurative art. The idea, the conception, and the material are so closely related, that they must be inseparable and of equal importance. For in figurative art one begins with a natural object, in non-figurative art one has only an abstract idea, and for a sculptor this idea is governed to a certain extent by the natural laws of the material, and it is within the limitations of the material that one must work.

Which artists have influenced your art and in what way are they especially significant to you?

In the beginning I was influenced by Henry Moore, when my work was figurative, but as I have gradually become more abstract, I have also become interested in the work of Brancusi

and Gonzales. Their influence has been less direct and positive than Moore's, but has resulted in a great simplicity of form, and a conscious attempt to define space.

Does it matter to you how your works are presented ?

Yes, but it is difficult to show non-figurative works very well in exhibitions, for they need space around them, both wall space and actual space. One might say that they need an environment in which to live. This is because they do not reflect life as do figurative works, but have a direct relationship to the wall behind, and to the space around. In fact as good non-figurative work is a thing complete in itself, with its own laws and life, and takes its place naturally and completely when placed in a suitable environment.

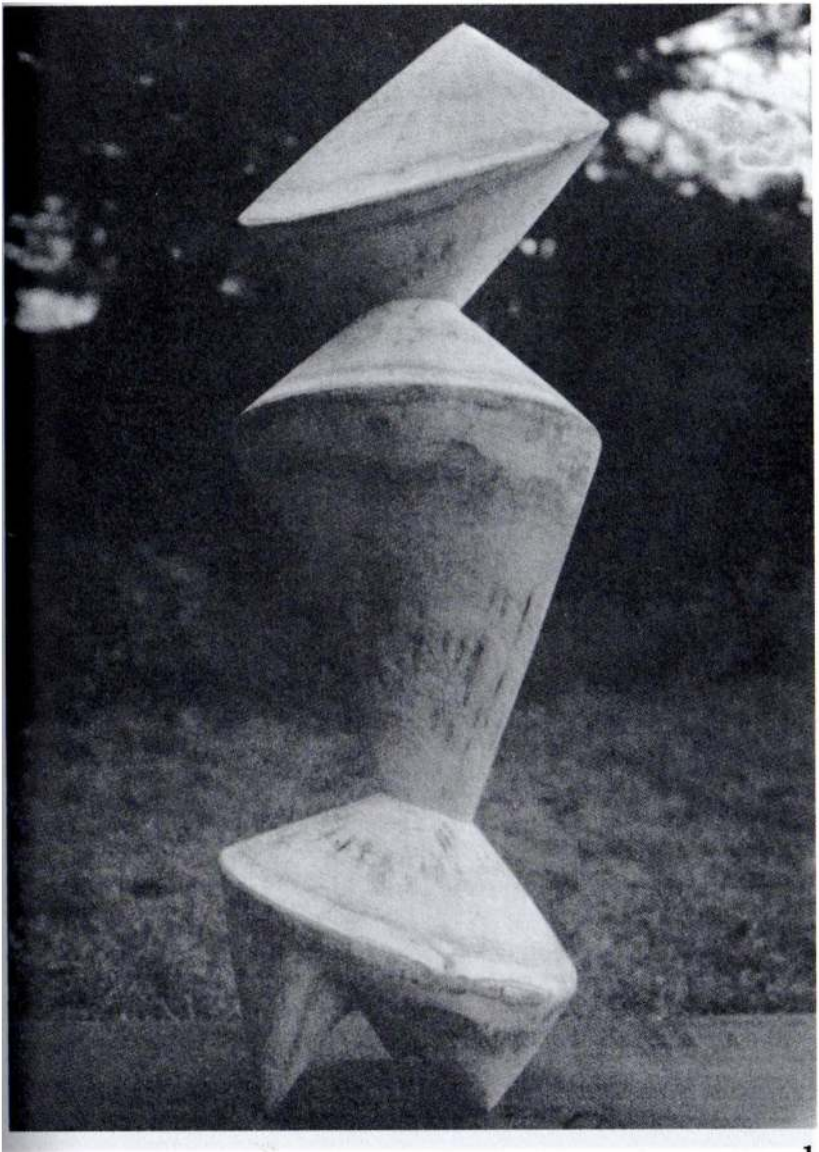
Can non-figurative art be taught ? Has it a transmissible academic content or method ?

Yes it can be taught just as well as figurative art. A progressive course can train one's sensibility and perception by using purely abstract elements, both for painting and sculpture. It can in fact produce a higher sensitivity and a greater respect and understanding of materials, than by the usual figurative method adopted by most art schools.

Do you think statements by artists assist or obscure the communication of the work of art ?

I think that statements by artists are important from time to time, not as an explanation of a particular work, but as a means of pointing a direction, or stating one's aims. The very personal nature of contemporary art and the diverse styles has made this almost a necessity.

1. *Dancer 1949.* Elm, 2ft. 8½in. high (coll: Museum Modern Art, New York)
2. *Divided Column 1952.* Holly, 14in. high.
3. *Curved Relief 1952.* African Wood, 7in. long.
4. *Pierced Relief 1952.* Mahogany, 14in. long.
5. *Triangular Bronze Form 1953.* 6in. x 5in.
6. *Monolithic Form 1954.* Concrete, 7ft. high x 5ft. wide (Holland Park International Open Air Exhibition 1954)



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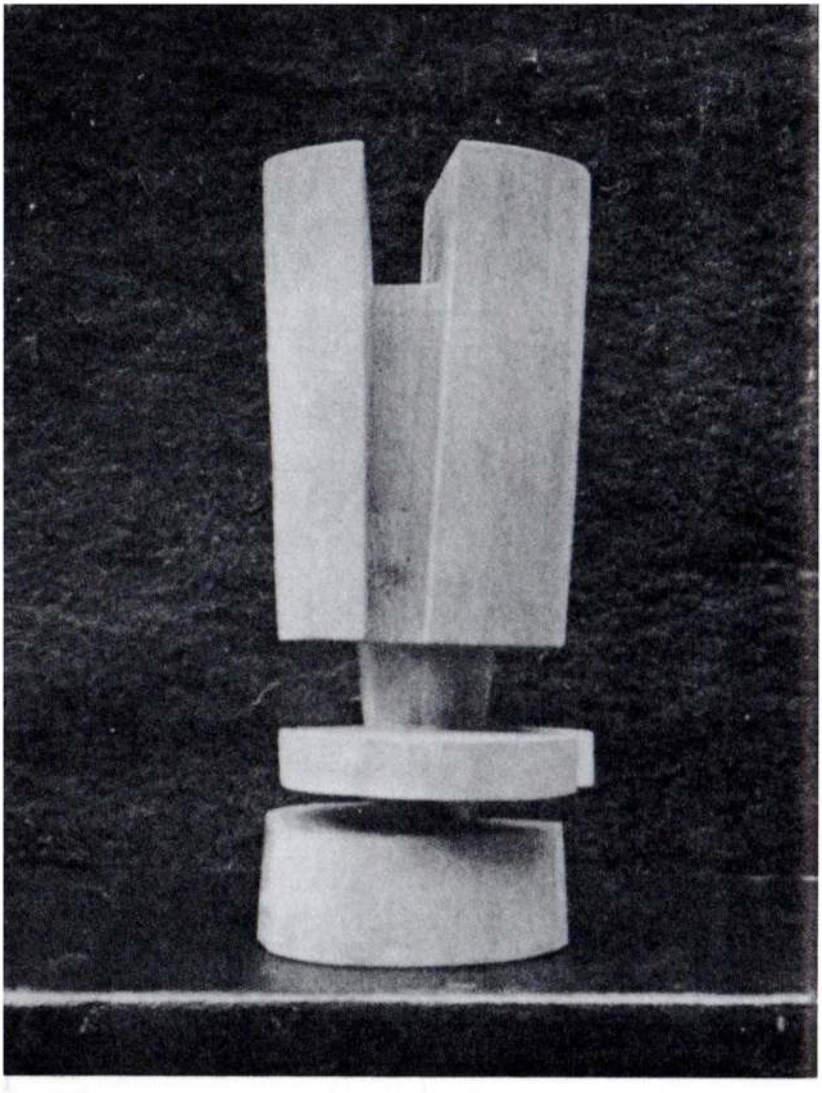

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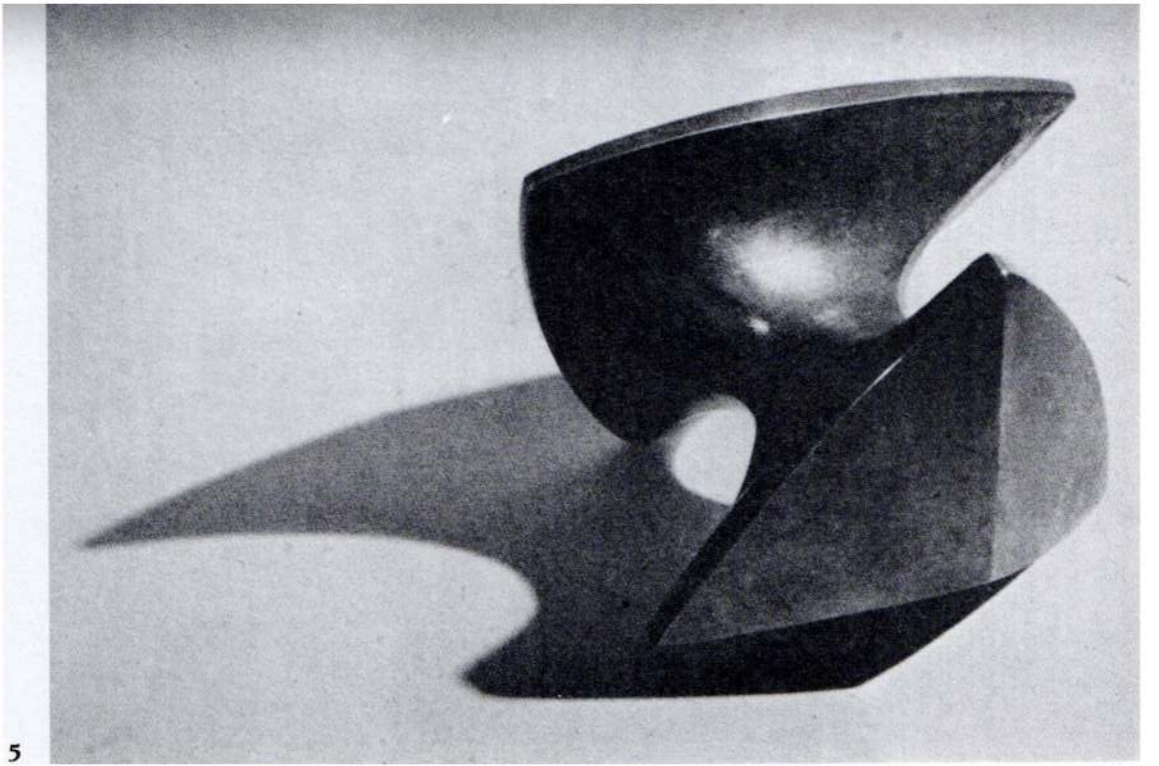

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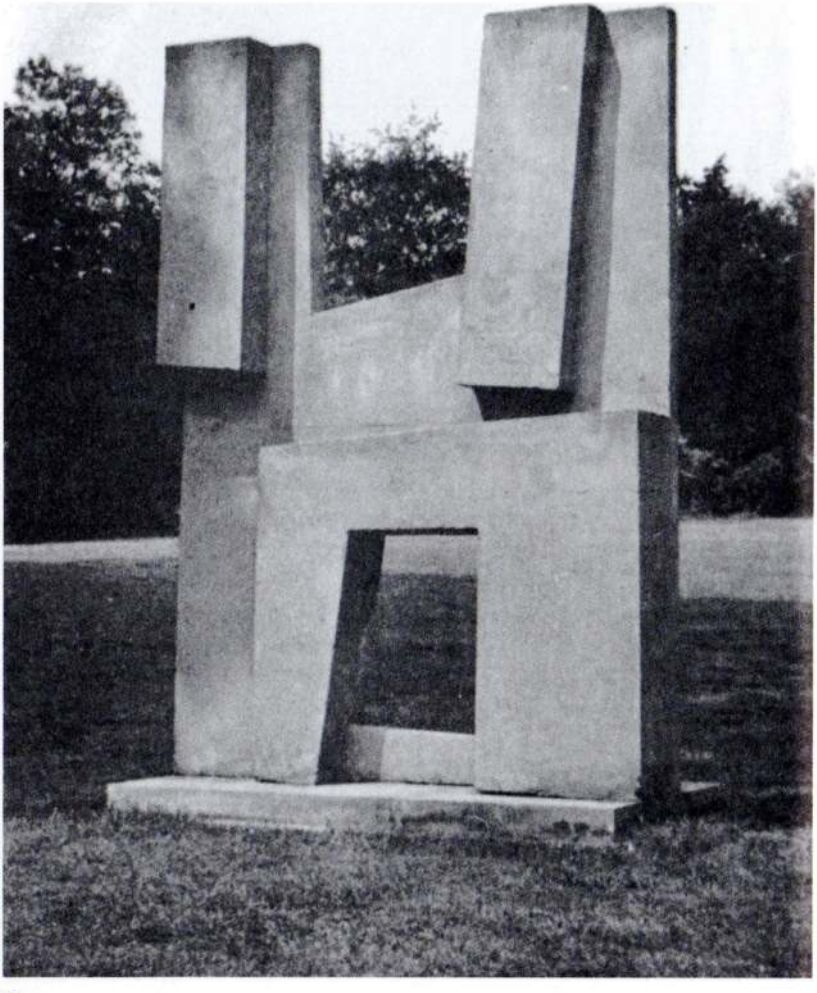

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T E R R Y F R O S T

BORN 1915, LEAMINGTON SPA. 1943 STARTED PAINTING WHILST P.O.W. GERMANY. 1946 MOVED TO ST. IVES, STUDIED AT ST. IVES SCHOOL OF PAINTING. 1947 EX-SERVICE GRANT TO STUDY AT CAMBERWELL SCHOOL OF ART, LONDON. 1950 RETURNED TO ST. IVES, ELECTED MEMBER PEN-WITH SOCIETY OF ARTS. 1951 EXHIBITED—A.I.A. ABSTRACT EXHIBITION, ABSTRACT EXHIBITION, NEW YORK, GIMPEL FILS ABSTRACT EXHIBITION. 1952 FIRST ONE-MAN SHOW, LEICESTER GALLERY, LONDON. EXHIBITED TATE GALLERY '17 COLLECTORS' EXHIBITION. 1953 AMERICAN ABSTRACT EXHIBITION WATER COLOURS, 'FIGURES IN THEIR SETTING,' TATE GALLERY.

It seems that when a painter tries to describe his sensations in words he is in danger of using those words loosely and ambiguously, for it is the very fact that visual creativity is his means of expression that makes him an artist. Hence in answering the question 'Why do I paint as I do?' it would be confusing and pointless to indulge in polysyllabic metaphysic. The most significant and the simplest approach to the question is by way of example: I have recently completed a 'blue movement' painting. I had spent a number of evenings looking out over the harbour at St. Ives in Cornwall. Although I had been observing a multiplicity of movement during those evenings, they all evoked a common emotion or mood—a state of delight in front of nature. On one particular blue twilit evening, I was watching what I can only describe as a synthesis of movement and counter-movement. That is to say the rise and fall of the boats, the space drawing of the mastheads, the opposing movements of the incoming sea and outblowing off-shore wind—all this plus the predominant feel of blue in the evening and the static brown of the foreshore, generated an emotional state which was to find expression in the painting *Blue Movement*.

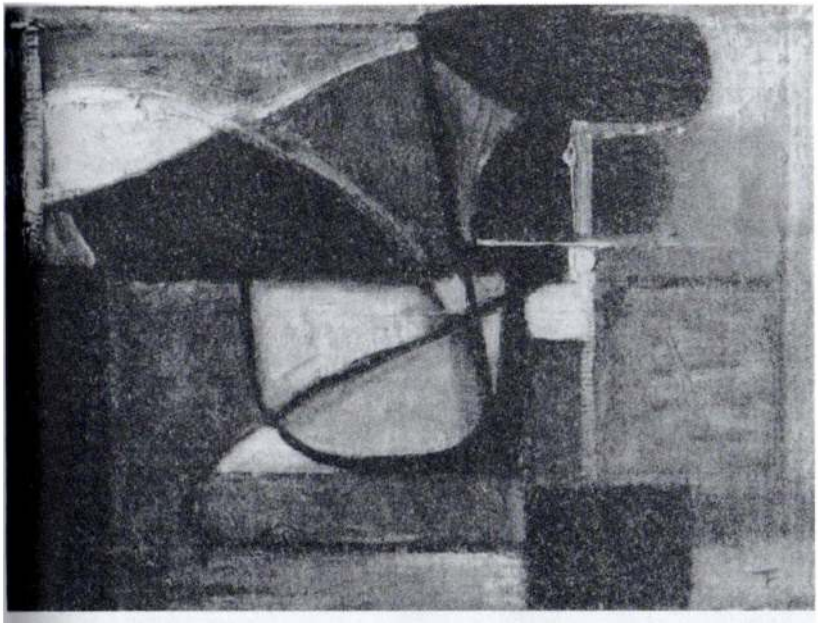
In this painting I was trying to give expression to my total experience of that particular evening. I was not portraying the boats, the sand, the horizon or any other subject-matter, but concentrating on the emotion engendered by what I saw. The subject-matter is in fact the sensation evoked by the move-

ments and the colour in the harbour. What I have painted is an arrangement of form and colour which evokes for me a similar feeling.

The process of painting this picture was not as swift and decisive as my description might imply. Its first form was that of a pencil drawing, then a monotone, then one, two and three-colour lino-cuts, a small painting of similar proportions and finally *Blue Movement* itself. These progressive stages helped me to clarify my ideas, to adjust the various forms to a state of dynamic equilibrium, and to arrive at a final proportion for the canvas.

The following are odd jottings from my notebook : Seeing is a matter of looking and feeling, for things do not look exactly like you think they do. To look with preconceived notions of visual experience is to destroy the possibility of creating again that experience in paint. If you know before you look, then you cannot see for knowing.

7. *Green and White Movement 1951.* Oil, 12in. x 16in.
8. *Movement: Green, Black and White.* Oil, 43in. x 34in. (coll: Bliss Collection)
9. *Blue Movement 1953.* Oil (coll: Contemporary Art Society)
10. *Corsham: Black and Silver 1953.* Oil, 43½in. x 30½in. (coll: Roger Mayne)
11. *Black and White 1953.* Oil, 30in. x 20in.
12. *Long Yellow Painting 1954.* Oil, 60in. x 25in. (coll: Mrs. Phillips)



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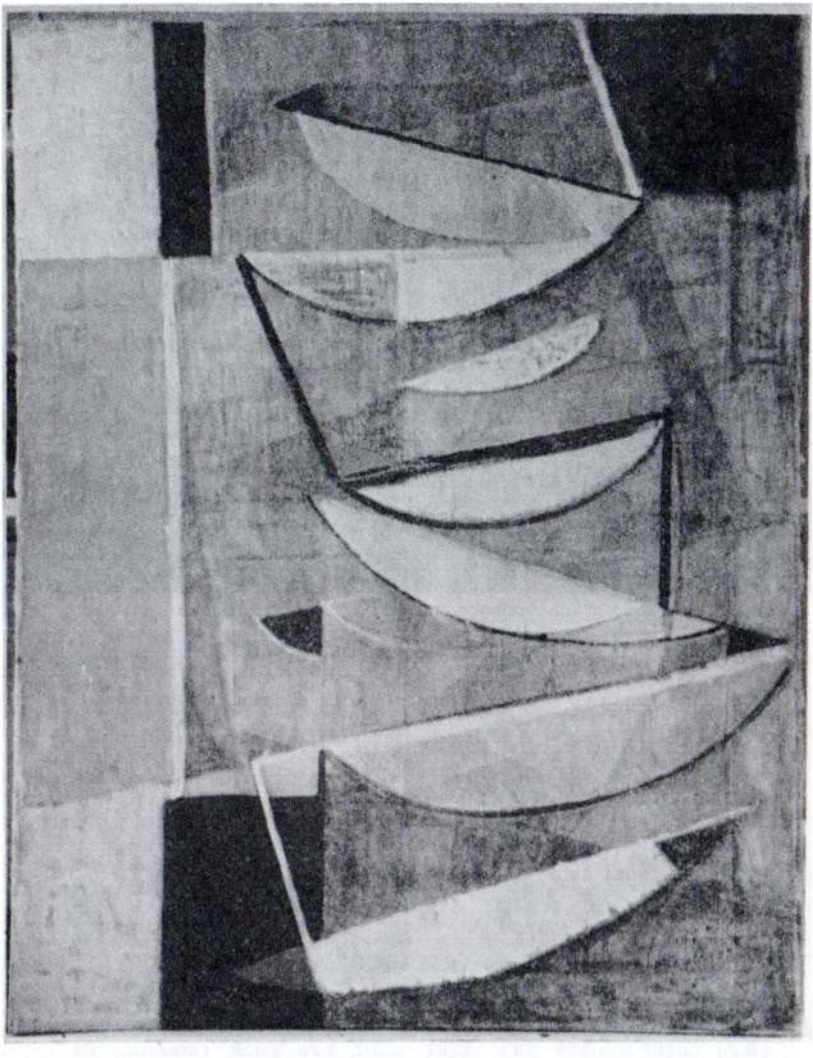

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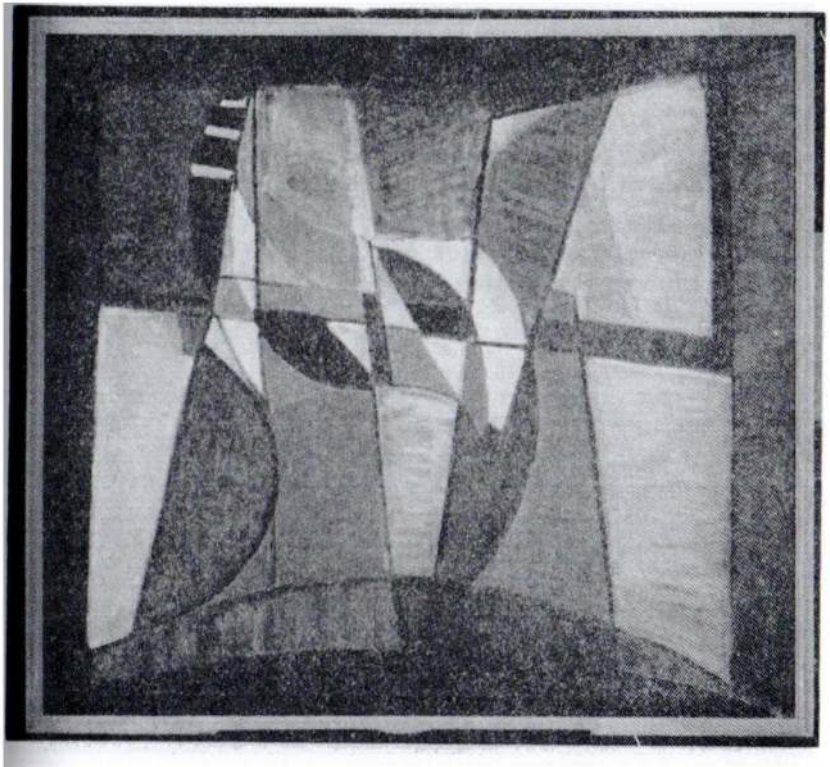

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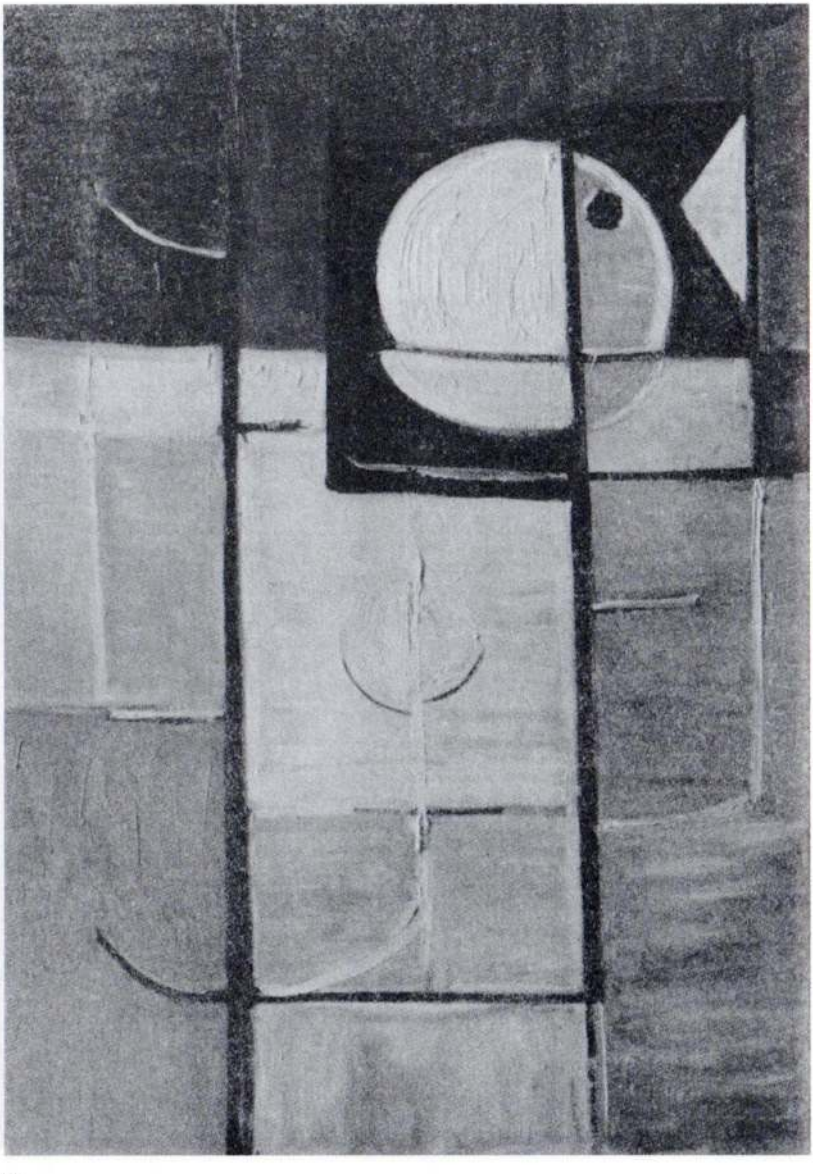

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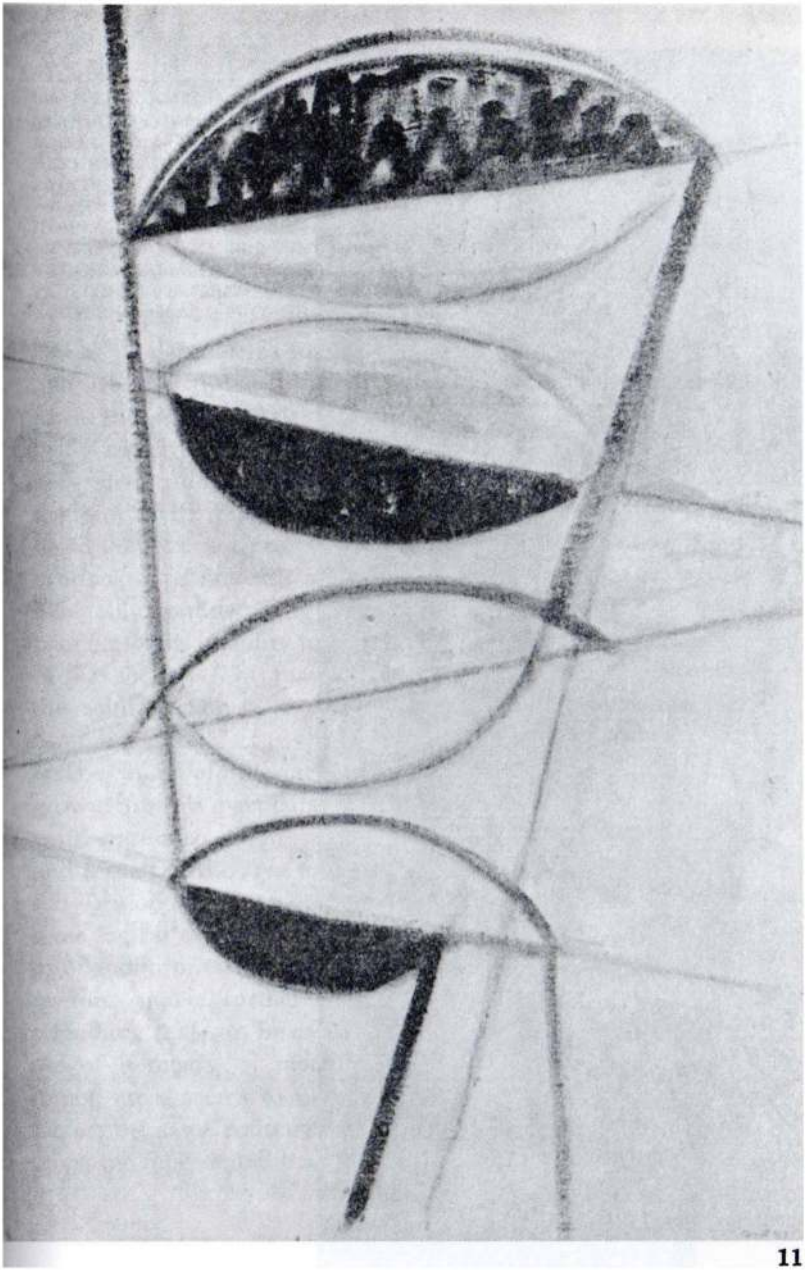

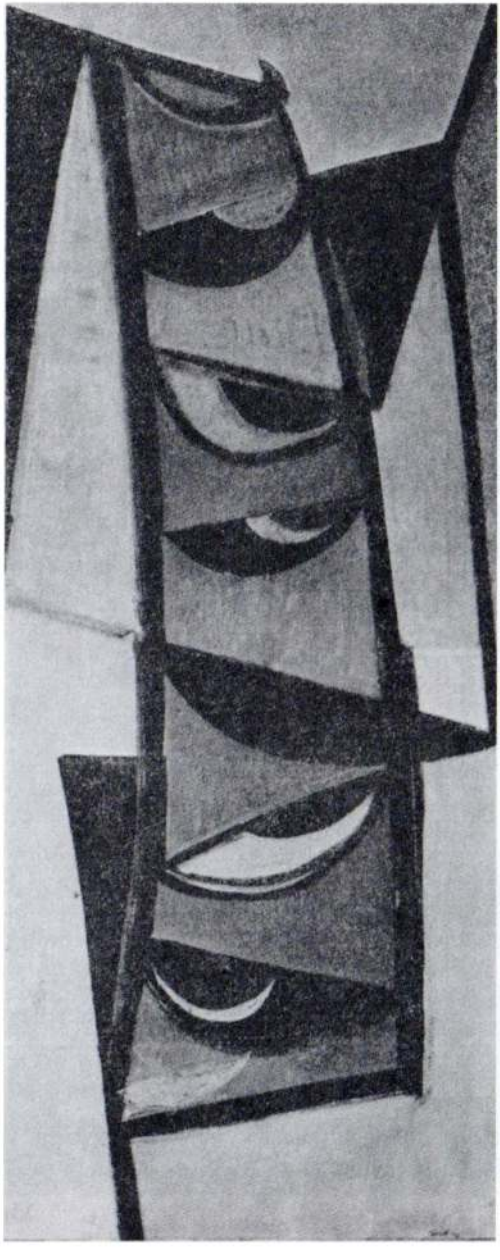

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A D R I A N H E A T H

BORN IN BURMA, 1920. FIRST PAINTED IN NEWLYN, CORNWALL, UNDER STANHOPE FORBES, R.A., AND IN 1939 AT THE SLADE SCHOOL, OXFORD. JOINED THE R.A.F. 1940. PRISONER OF WAR GERMANY 1942-1945. RETURNED TO THE SLADE AFTER THE WAR FOR TWO YEARS AND THEN PAINTED IN THE SOUTH OF FRANCE. FIRST ABSTRACT PAINTING SHOWN AT THE LONDON GROUP 1949. EXHIBITED AT THE SALON DES REALITES NOUVELLES, AND REPRESENTED IN ' 17 COLLECTORS ' C.A.S. EXHIBITION AT TATE GALLERY 1952. IN 1953 HELD FIRST ONE-MAN SHOW AT THE REDFERN GALLERY, AND HAD A LECTURE ON THE ORIGINS OF ABSTRACT PAINTING PUBLISHED IN THE SAME YEAR. HAS EXHIBITED AT THE REDFERN, ROLAND BROWSE AND DELBANCO, AND GIMPEL FILS.

The vital problems for me arise in the studio or workshop and are inseparable from my materials and their existence as form and colour. As problems, they cannot be dismissed as being merely technical ones—ideas and emotions are largely generated from this direct and continuous contact with the medium itself. But there is so much art-literature written by those that are not artists that this fundamental point is often overlooked. Ends are always quoted before means. Art is inevitably considered by them in relationship to society, and blamed for its inability to communicate with the vast majority of that society. This may well be so, but I cannot believe that the solution lies in a direct and self-conscious attempt at communication.

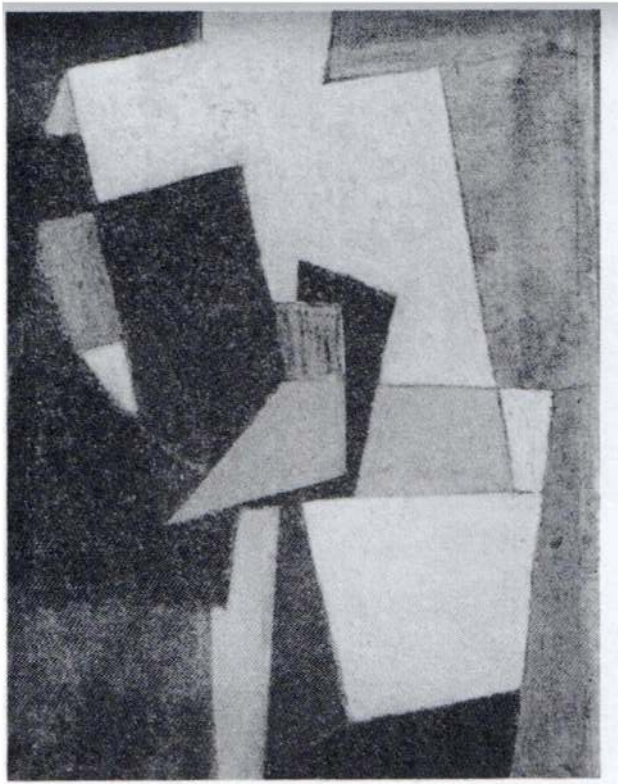
The thing of interest is the actual life of the work : its growth from a particular white canvas or board. I use the word particular to stress, for me, the importance of the size and format of the area to be painted, as it is from its first basic sub-division that my picture grows. The problem is to exercise some logical or objective control on its gradual evolution, for to abandon oneself in a purely subjective way to a sensuous medium makes further progress difficult. One is left with something that can be easily changed but not developed. The use of numbers, of measurement, of mathematically determined areas seems to offer this control, also as an external factor, the same resistance to pure subjectivity that the model offers the representational painter, or the literary anecdote, the

illustrator. It is the process, the method of development that is the life of the painting, and this that absorbs my interest rather than the attractions of any particular form or colour. The forms themselves, their size and position are born from the process. In fact all forms should witness clearly to their evolution. The colour and shape of their past is responsible for their present which is richer for these transitions.

When should this process come to a halt? When is the painting or construction finished? One can curtail its development at an early stage and concentrate on a few basic and simple relationships that can be so carefully articulated and polished in their adjustment that they become profoundly satisfying, or allow these shapes to sub-divide and proliferate according to a series of progressions. Both methods seem equally valid. The danger of elaboration is that it may be carried out against one's emotional inclination, then it can only result in some complex structure, the arid unfolding of a tortuous system. Enforced simplicity can lead to emptiness. In both cases it is a failure to synthesise the rational and intuitive.

Ultimately can a final form be achieved in a painting any more than it is in a natural growth such as a tree or a flower? Both are shaped by the continuous play of opposing forces. Each successive state is complete in itself, but the most lasting satisfaction is obtained from the one that gives us the clearest insight into the structural process that has been involved, and is the emotional recognition of a truth outside oneself, yet created by oneself.

13. *Climbing Composition in Blue 1950.* Oil, 32in. x 20in.
14. *Interlocking Planes 1950.* Oil, 19in. x 14½in.
15. *Composition: Orange and Black 1952.* Oil and Ripolin, 48in. x 41in.
16. *Divided Form 1953.* Oil, 30in. x 30in.
17. *Curved Forms: Yellow and Black.* Oil, 36in. x 24in.
18. *Composition: White and Yellow 1953.* Oil, 34in. x 24in.
19. *Composition: Orange, Black and Grey 1953.* Oil, 32in. x 24in. (coll: John Sykes)



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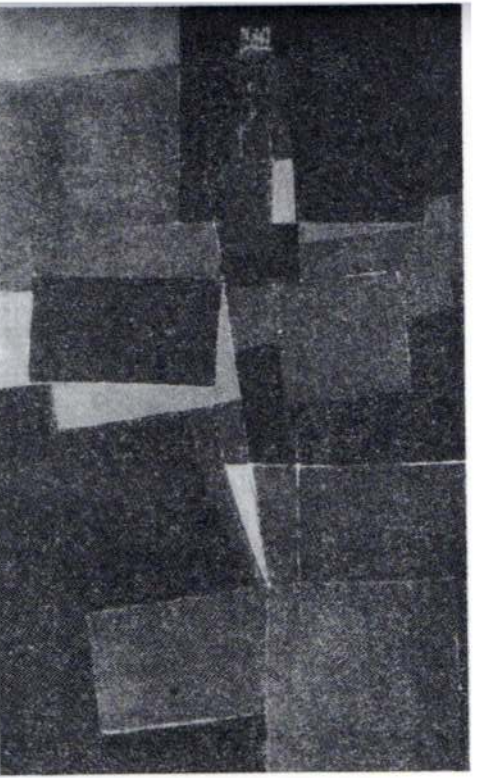

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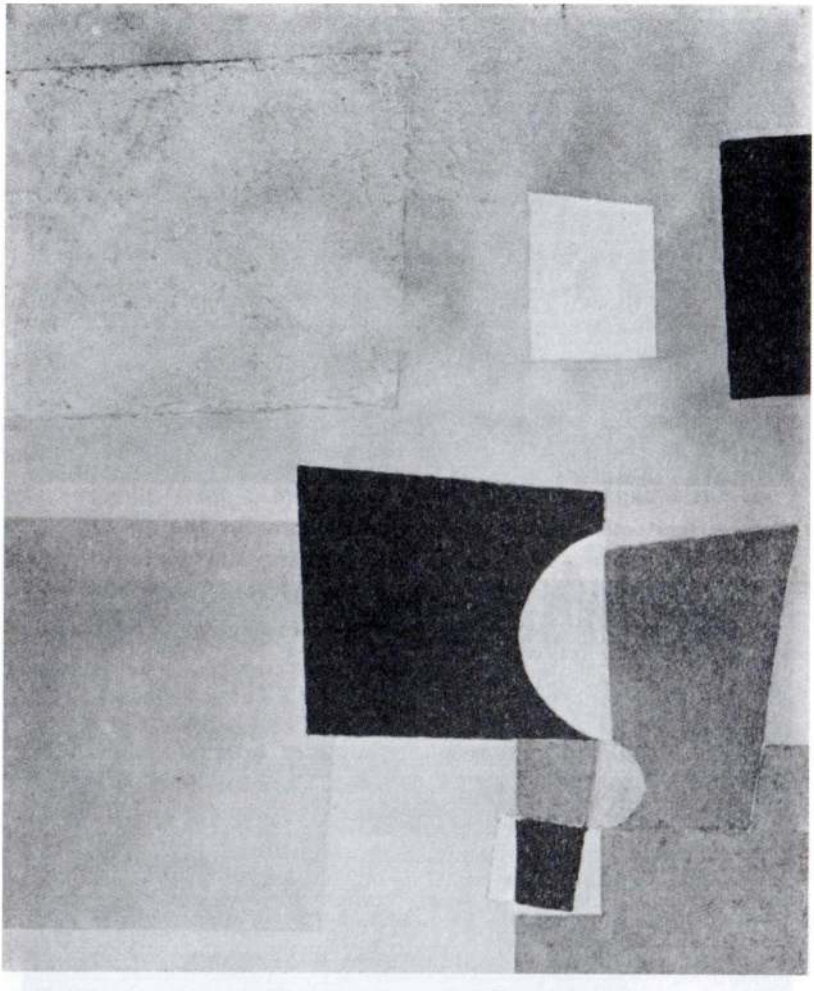

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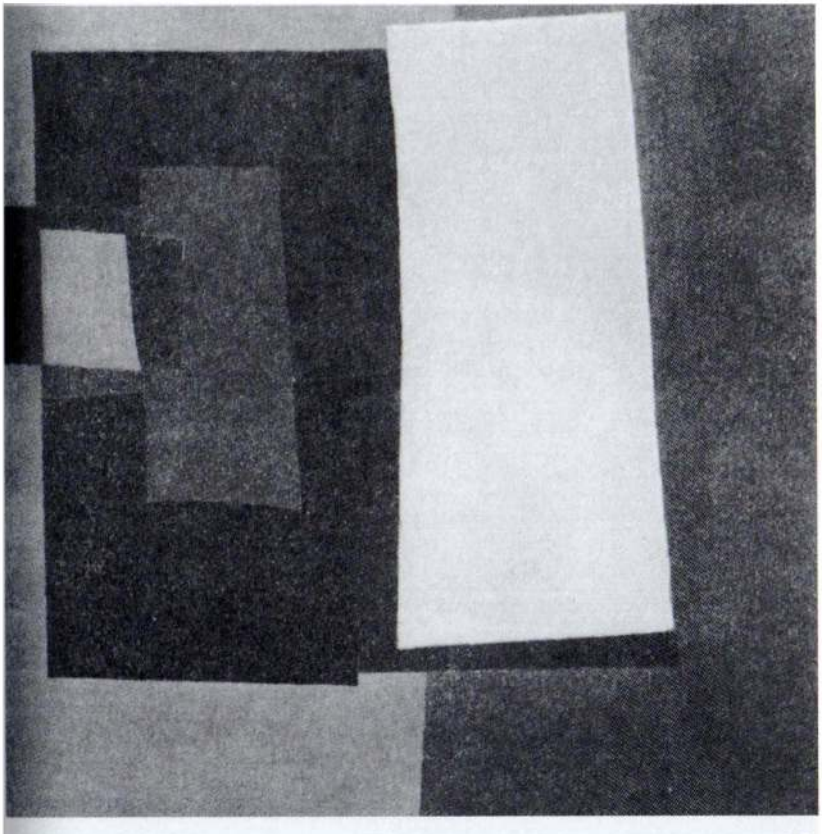

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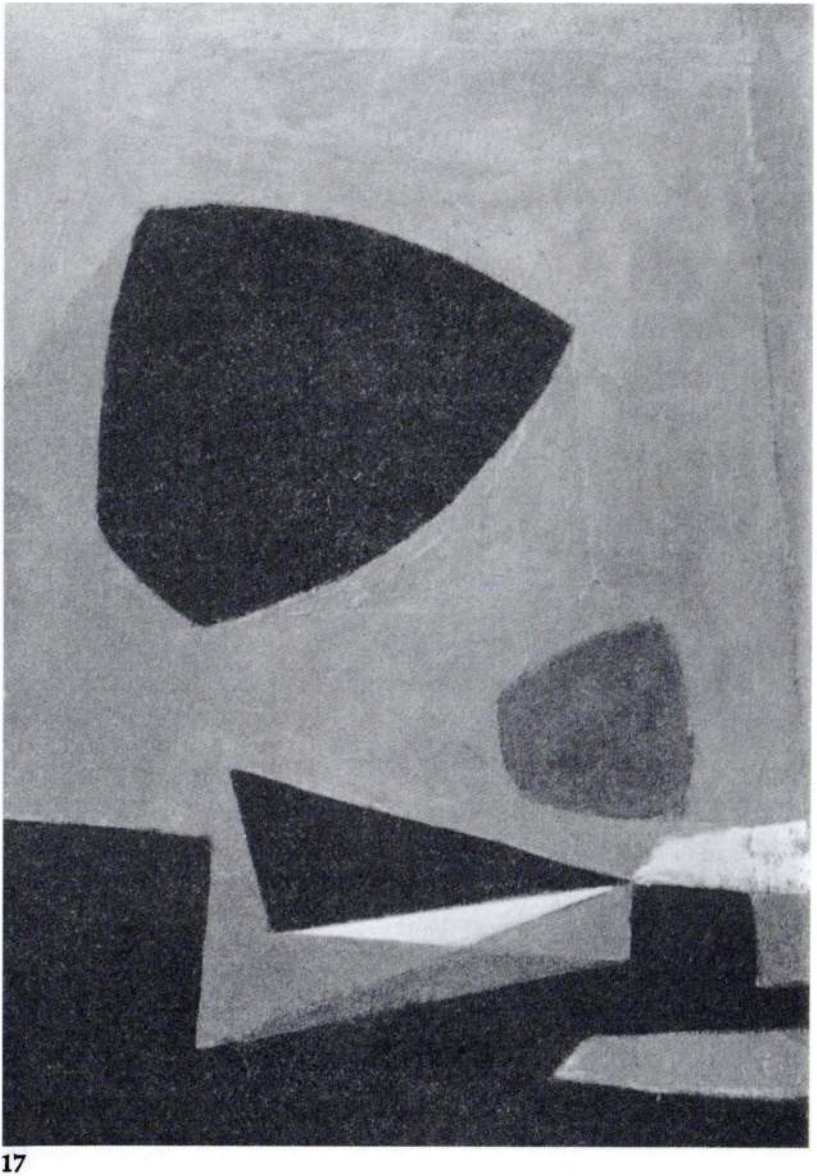

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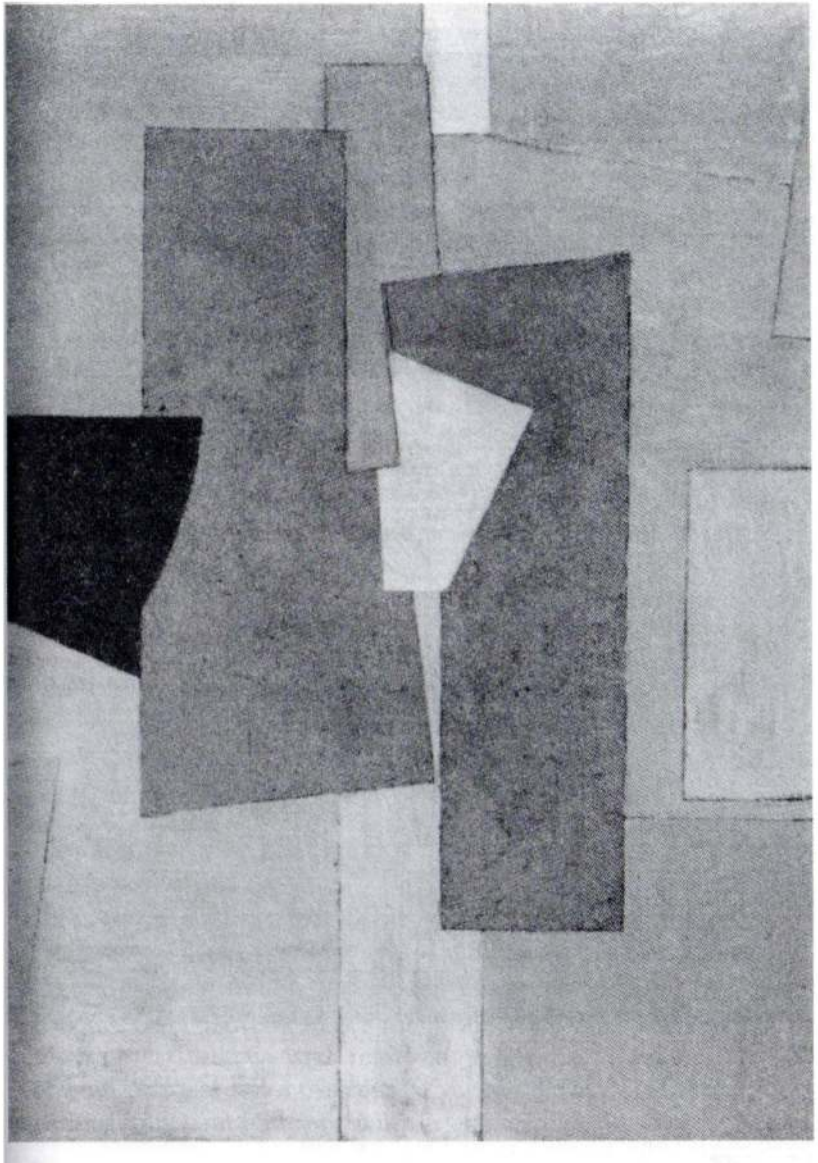
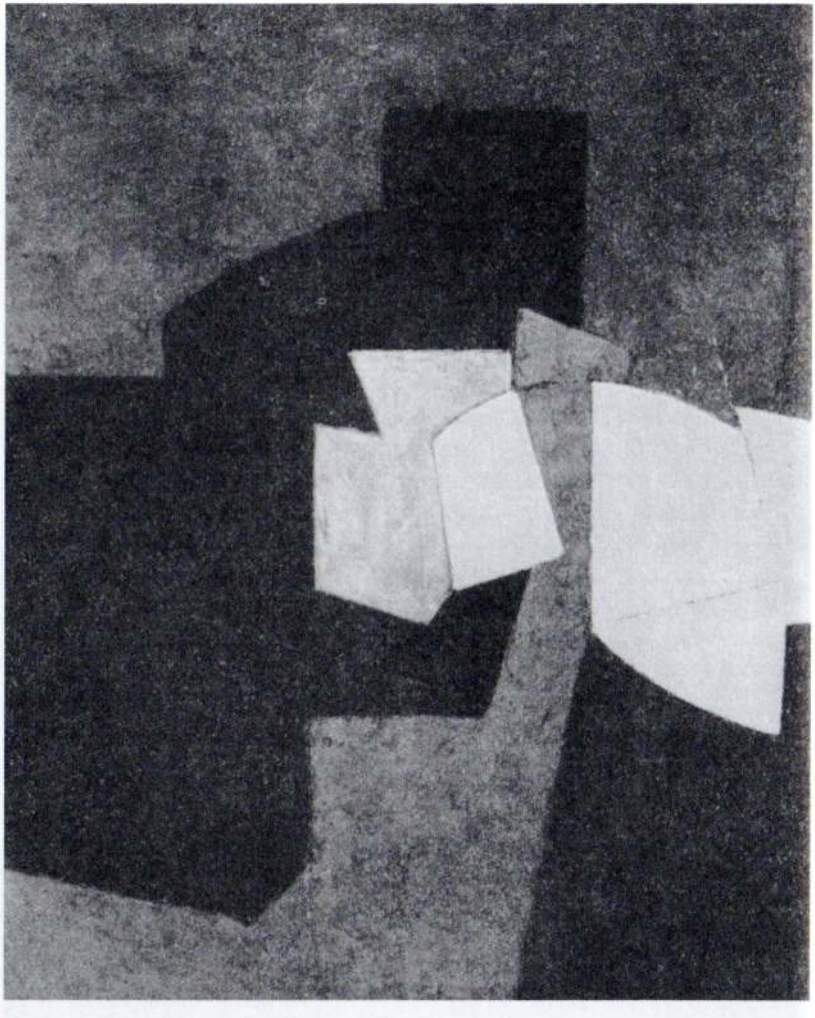




19

A N T H O N Y H I L L

BORN LONDON 1930. ATTENDED ART SCHOOLS IN LONDON 1947-51, INCLUDING CENTRAL SCHOOL OF ART (INTERIOR DESIGN DEPARTMENT) AND MADE SEVERAL VISITS TO PARIS—OTHERWISE SELF TAUGHT. EXHIBITED FIRST AT INSTITUTE OF CONTEMPORARY ARTS EXHIBITION 'ASPECTS OF BRITISH ART 1950.' SUBSEQUENTLY IN LONDON AND PARIS. REPRODUCTIONS OF WORK IN *BROADSHEET* NO. 1, *TYPOGRAPHICA* No. 4, *ART D'AUJOURD'HUI, ARTI VISIVE*, ETC. PUBLISHED WRITINGS INCLUDE 'MOBILES AND ALEXANDER CALDER,' *BROADSHEET* No. 1 (1951), 'AN INTRODUCTION TO CONCRETE ART,' *BROADSHEET* No. 2 (1952), A PORTION OF WHICH HAS BEEN TRANSLATED AND APPEARED IN *ART D'AUJOURD'HUI* (BRITISH NUMBER 1953); 'MAX BILL—THE SEARCH FOR THE UNITY OF THE PLASTIC ARTS IN CONTEMPORARY LIFE' *TYPOGRAPHICA* No. 7 (1953), BEING THE FIRST STUDY OF THE FULL SCOPE OF THE WORK OF MAX BILL TO APPEAR IN ENGLISH. FROM 1950 ONWARDS HAS MADE RESEARCHES INTO THE PRINCIPAL PROBLEMS OF PURE PLASTIC ART AS HE SEES THEM TO BE, NAMELY:—SYNTACTIC, THE RELATIONS IN THE CONSTITUENT STRUCTURE, THE INTERNAL PLASTIC LOGIC; SEMANTIC, THE RELATION OF THE INTERNAL STRUCTURE TO THE STRUCTURE OF THE EXTERNAL (REALITY); PRAGMATIC, THE RELATION OF THE SYNTATIC AND SEMANTIC THEMATIC ISSUES TO THE INTEGRAL PROBLEM OF THE PLASTIC-ENVIRONMENTAL REALM (THE TOTAL VISUAL DOMAIN) AND ITS PLACE IN MAN'S SPIRITUAL HIERARCHY. HAS WORKED IN VARIOUS WAYS, RANGING FROM THE EXTREMES OF 'FREE PAINTING' TO THAT OF DESIGNING FOR SERIAL PRODUCTION, IS PARTICULARLY INTERESTED IN THE ISSUE OF SYNTHESIS, PLASTIC ART, AND ARCHITECTURE. BELIEVES THAT IT IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE ARTIST TO EVOLVE OUT OF HIS WORK AND THOUGHT AN AESTHETIC, AND THIS HE IS BOUND TO EXPRESS NOT SOLELY IN HIS WORK BUT ALSO IN WORDS; THAT HE WILL SPEAK AND/OR WRITE OF CERTAIN PRINCIPLES OF CONDUCT AND ULTIMATELY EXPRESS OPINIONS WHICH WILL FORM THE BASIS OF VALUE THEORIES INDEPENDENT OF THOSE OF CRITICS AND AUTHORITIES.

'Abstract art' is at best an historical term, explaining nothing, but designating the non-figurative movements antipathetic to mimetic art, surrealism, cubism, and expressionism.

Such art, confusingly known either as 'concrete' or 'abstract' is distinct from most 'non-figurative art,' which is either at bottom related to cubism, surrealism, or expressionism or if not figurative in origin and spacial-formal context merely doodling and pattern work; such works have no coherent thematic or esthetic and must be judged as representing obscure personal styles of artists in various degrees of conflict with figuration and mimeticism.

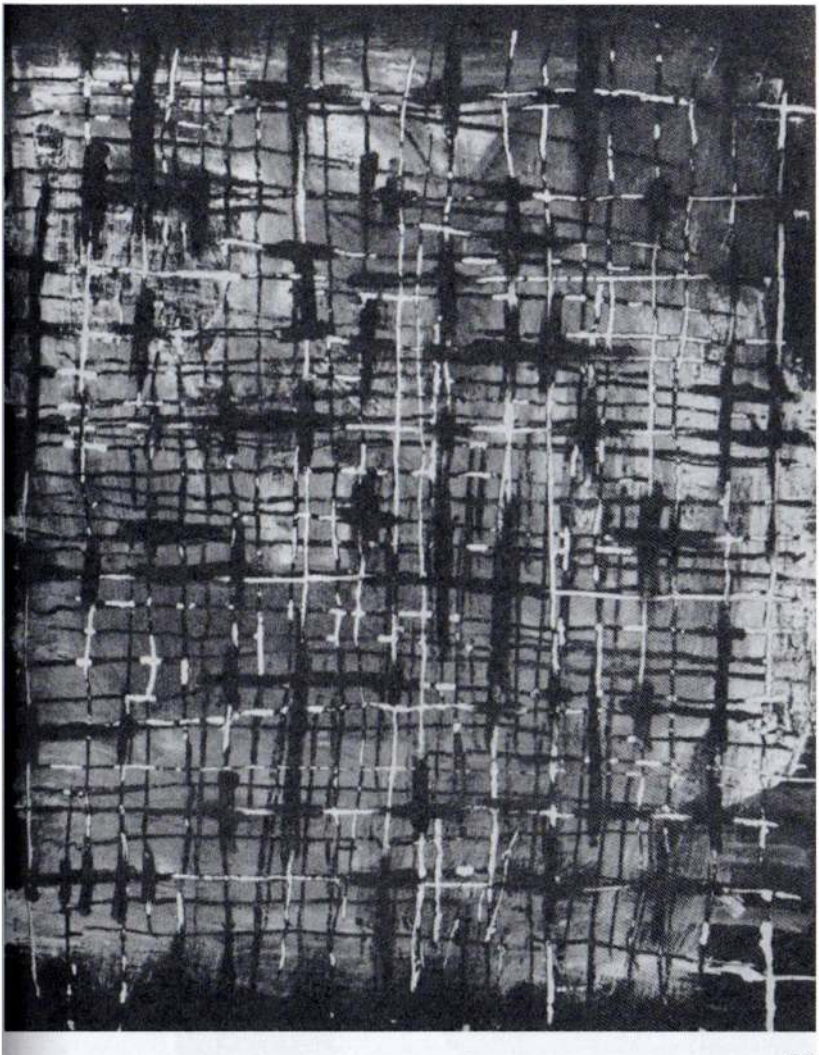
Broadly speaking, the two main trends of abstract art are then found to be the architectonic and the mathematical, the 'de Stijl' was the origin of the architectonic way and constructivism the mathematical. Mondrian, van Doesburg, Gorin, del Marle, Lohse and Diller representing the former, and Gabo, Pevsner, Vantongerloo, Moholy, and Bill, the latter 'way.'

Abstract art seen as these two 'ways' represent the first efforts to found an art for a new age, a non-mimetic art aiming at an esthetic of objective invention and sensation, distinctly rational and determinist in contrast to the subjectivist limbo in which the greater part of art is today submerged.

In its first phase Abstract art unquestionably made an important impact on the environmental arts and through the ideal of synthesis showed a direction with which it alone amongst the modern movements in the plastic arts was able to contribute positively towards the shaping of the spiritual and material outlook of our modern civilisation.

The work is the sum of what is in it and can be considered as the resolving of the situation where all variants of a formalised thematic grouped by criteria are ordered by principles of hierarchy. This attempted portrayal of the state of affairs is not offered as a recipe or a description, but as a description of the nature of the class of processes.

20. *Free Orthogonal Composition 1953.* Oil, 38in. x 49in.
21. *Collage 1951.* Various mediums, 22in. x 26in.
22. *Loopline 1953.* Photoprint, 20in. x 16in.
23. *Composition: Red on White 1952.* Oil, 36in. x 36in.
24. *Composition: Catenary Rhythms.* Project for mural 1952-1954. Enamel paint, 82in. x 42in.
25. *Orthogonal Composition 1954.* Oil, 54in. x 24in.



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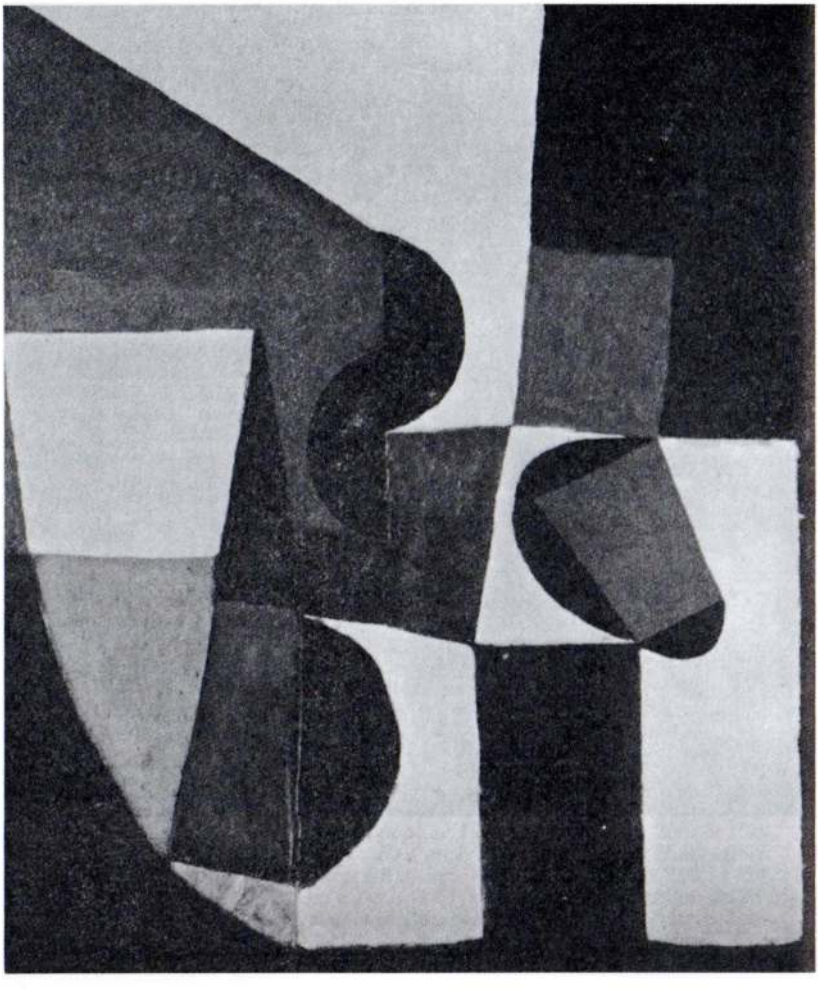

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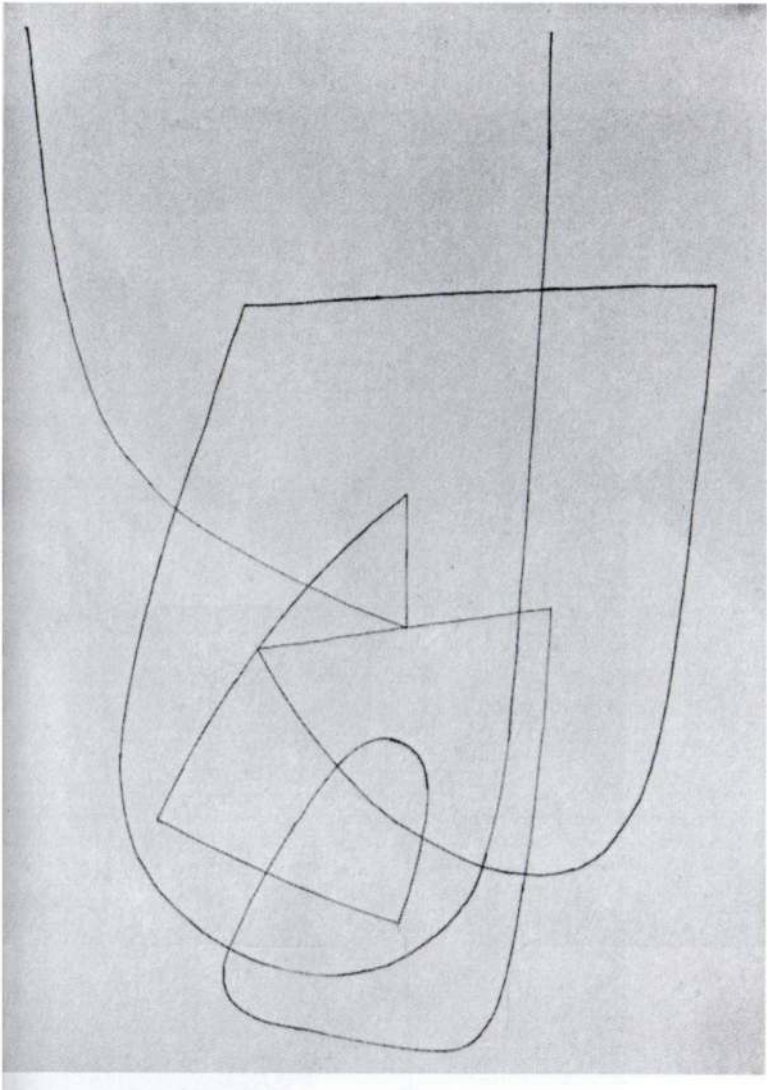

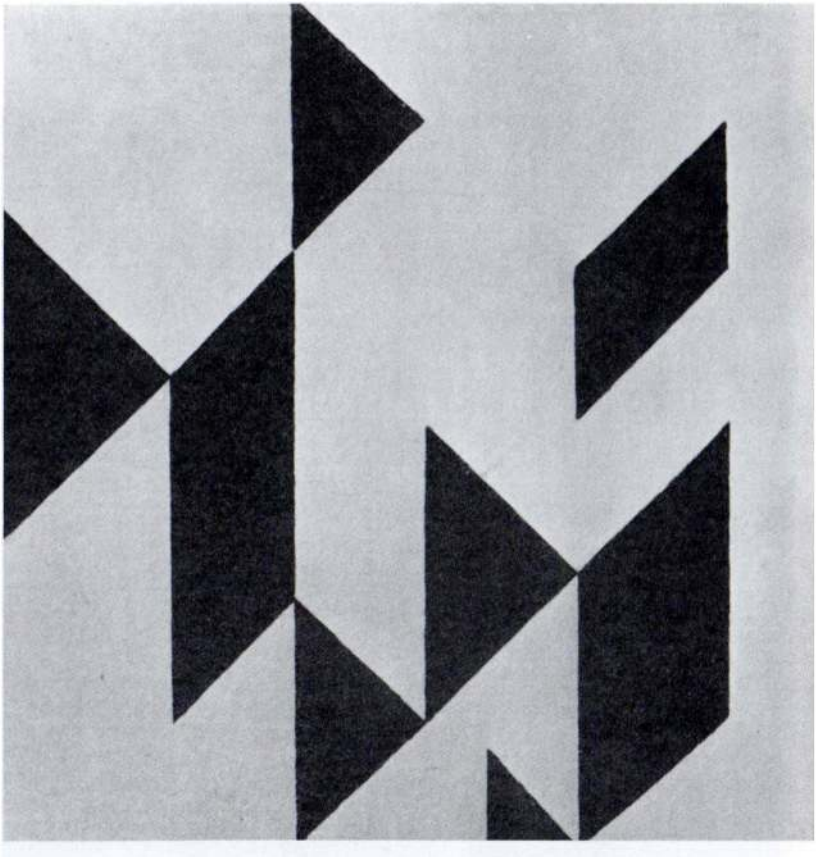

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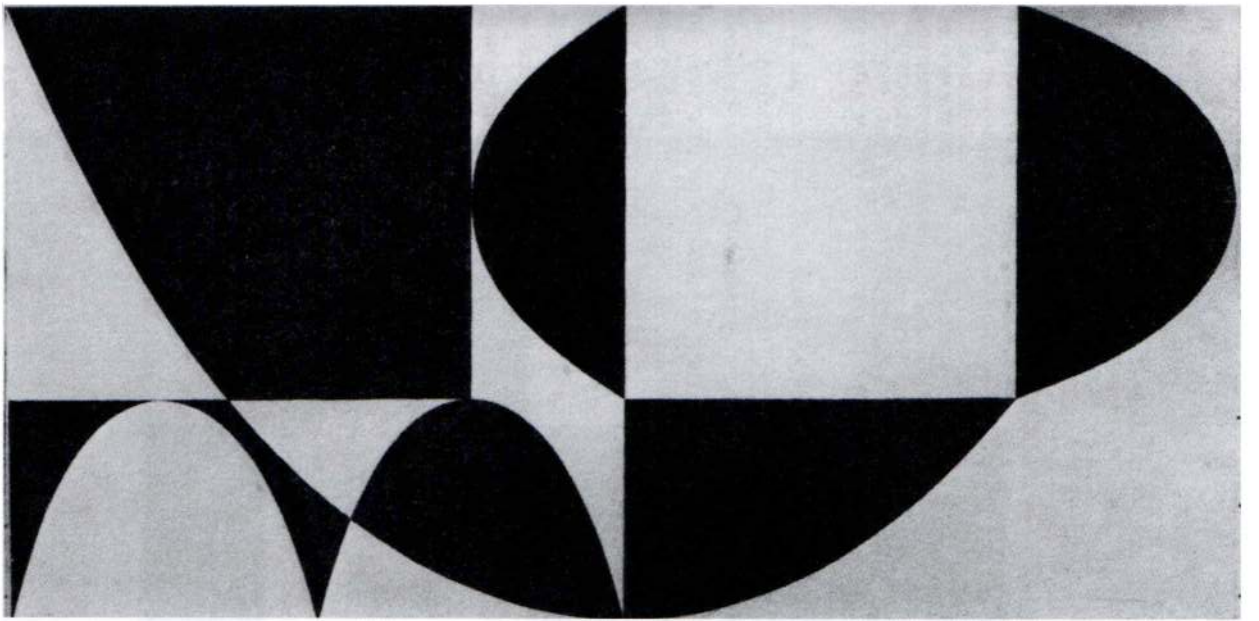

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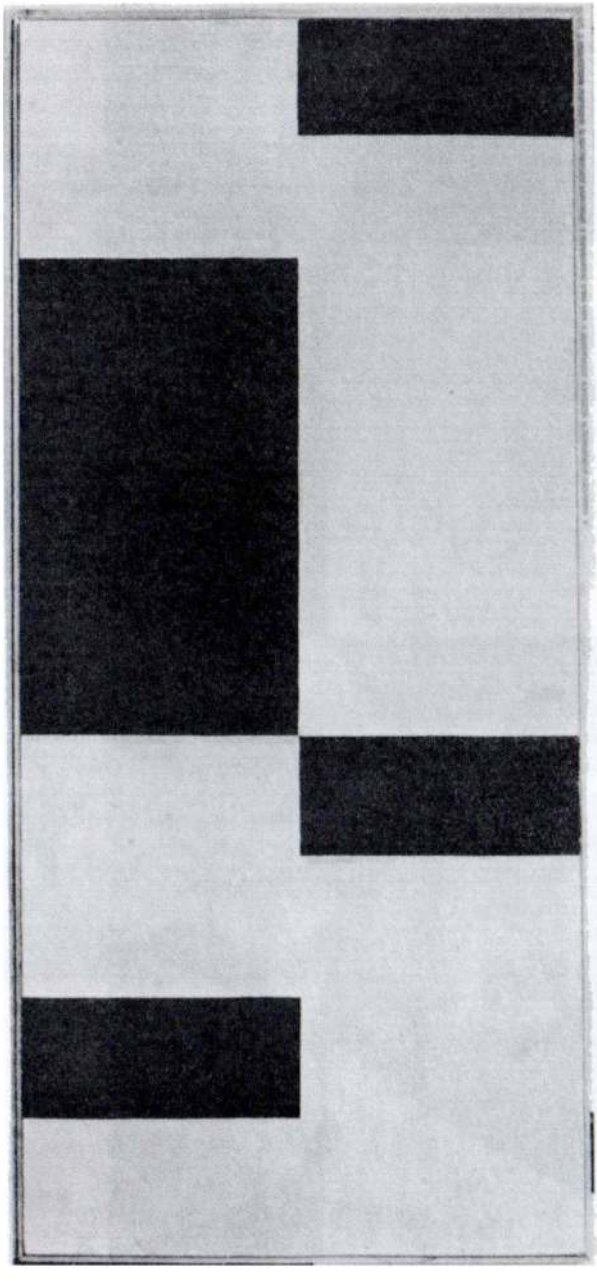


R O G E R H I L T O N

BORN IN NORTHWOOD, MIDDLESEX, IN 1911. STUDIED AT THE SLADE, WHERE HE WAS AWARDED A SLADE SCHOLARSHIP AND AN ORPEN BURSARY. THIS WAS FOLLOWED BY WORK IN PARIS AT THE ACADEMIE RANSON UNDER BISSIERE. IN 1937 HE HAD A SHOW AT THE BLOOMSBURY GALLERY, AND WAS REPRESENTED AT AGNEWS' 'CORONATION EXHIBITION OF BRITISH ART.'

FROM 1939 TO 1945 HE WAS IN THE ARMY AND WAS TAKEN PRISONER AT DIEPPE IN 1942. HIS FIRST SHOW AT GIMPEL FILS WAS IN JUNE, 1952, AND THIS WAS FOLLOWED BY INCLUSION IN SUCH EXHIBITIONS AS '17 COLLECTORS' (TATE, 1952), 'CONTEMPORARY BRITISH ART' (GALERIE DE FRANCE, PARIS, 1952), 'FIGURES IN THEIR SETTING' (TATE, 1953), 'RECENT BRITISH PAINTING' (ARTS COUNCIL, 1954).

PURCHASERS OF HIS WORK INCLUDE THE CONTEMPORARY ART SOCIETY AND THE STEDELIJKMUSEUM MUSEUM, AMSTERDAM. HE TEACHES AT THE CENTRAL SCHOOL OF ARTS, LONDON.

I suppose few artists really know what they are doing; it is an instinctive, irrational, activity; they have, however, certain broad ideas along which they work. I will try to show the sort of ideas with which I am concerned in *painting*; for of course one's ideas about living are more important.

I have moved away from the sort of so-called non-figurative painting where lines and colours are flying about in an illusory space; from pictures which still had depth, or from pictures which had space *in* them; from spatial pictures in short, to space-creating pictures. The effect is to be felt outside rather than inside the picture : the picture is to be not primarily an image, but a space-creating mechanism.

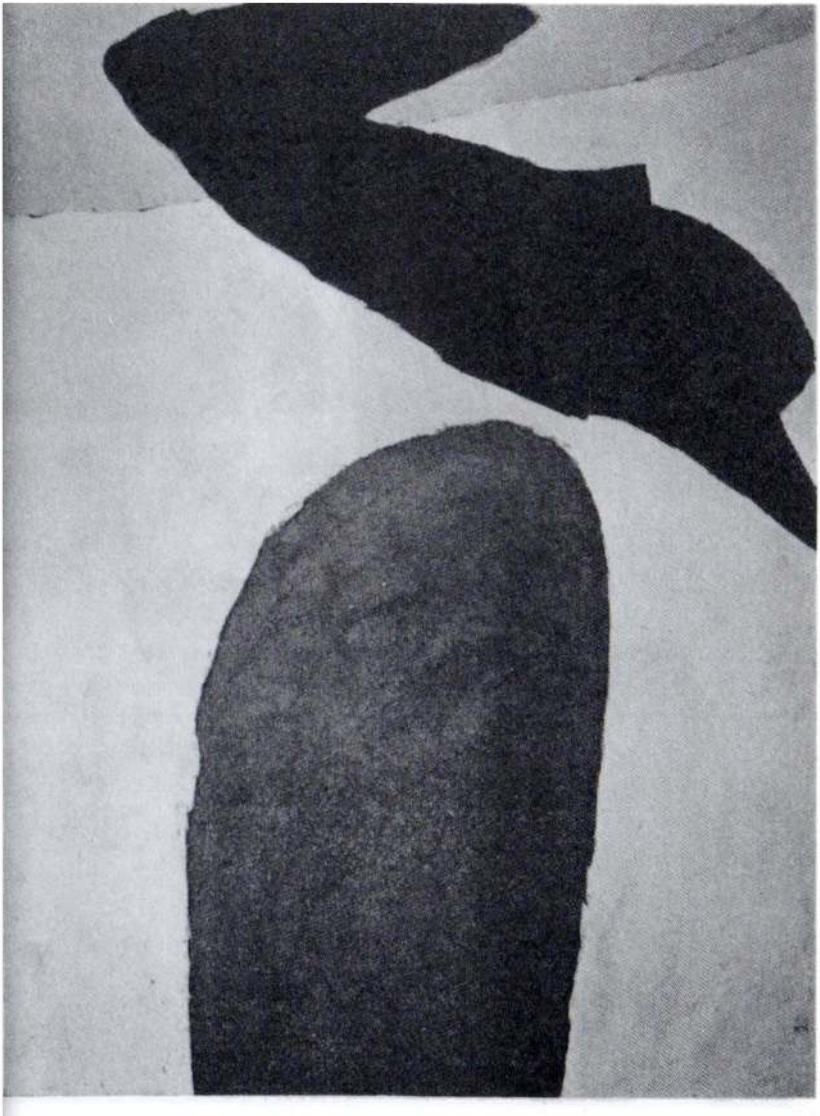
If we are interested in solids it is the picture which is the solid. It is for us real paint on real canvas. This paint on canvas will not represent something other than itself; but the interactions of its colours, positioning and lines will be arranged, not in just any harmonious order, but in such a way as not to interrupt the flow of space; so that they will, as it were, bear witness to space. Not space in the sense of a hollow space. But a more positive thing which one is obliged to call space.

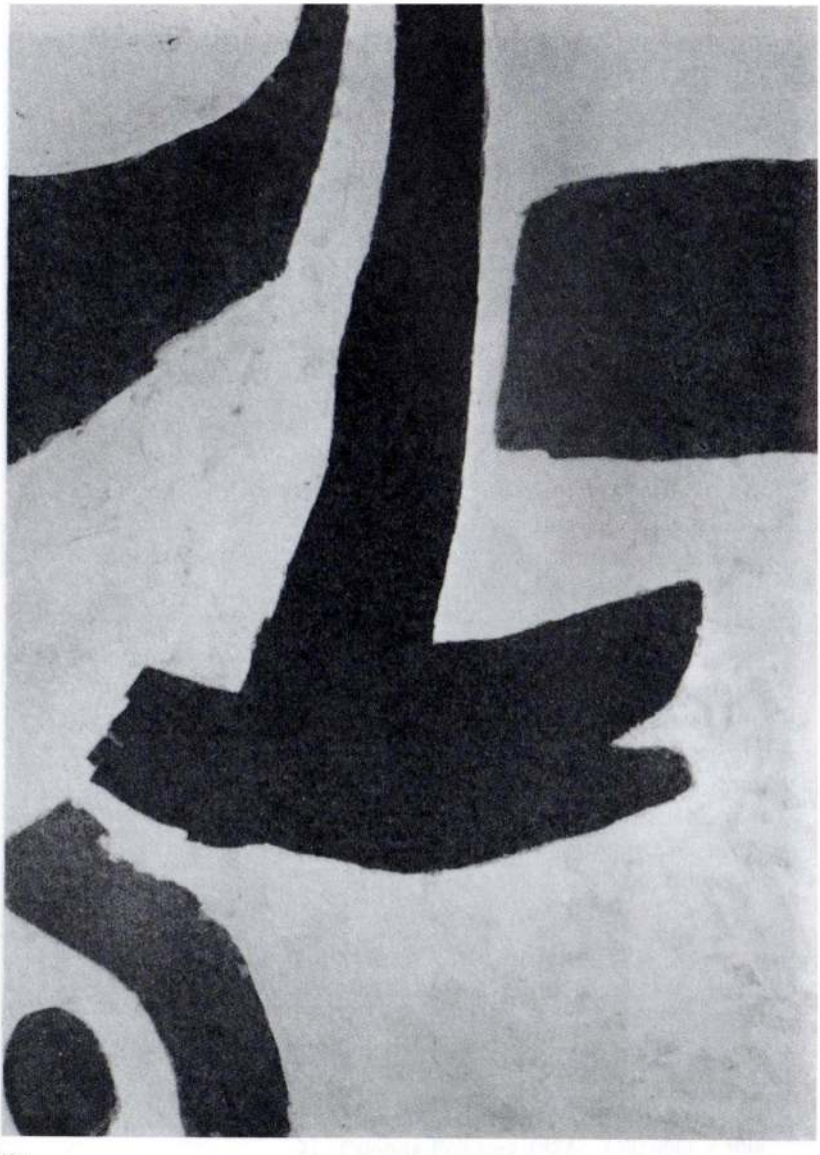
I have a taste for plain pictures ; I like my colours dynamic and strongly contrasted. After all, one prefers something alive to something dead. The more alive a person or a picture, the better they are. Any picture which does not give an immediate sensation of vitality is a dead picture.

In the last resort a painter is a seeker after truth. Abstract art is the result of an attempt to make pictures more real, an attempt to come nearer to the essence of painting; the truth which makes of it an art rather than a craft. At the moment, one aspect of this search materialises itself in a preoccupation with the activisation of real space by a picture, as opposed to the old way of presenting an illusion of space behind the picture plane. Artists throughout the ages have always had some technical preoccupation and this is what we have now. Thus for us the role of a picture has changed considerably. It is no longer regarded as a vehicle for images or even as an arrangement of shapes. It has become an instrument, a kind of catalyst for the activisation of the surrounding space.

The abstract painter submits himself entirely to the unknown. He believes that today, the true language of colour and form is obscured and rendered ineffective by being put to the service of representation. Thus he is like a man swinging out into the void; his only props his colours, his shapes and their space-creating powers. Can he construct with these means a barque capable of carrying not only himself to some further shore, but with the aid of others, a whole flotilla which may be seen, eventually, as having been carrying humanity forward to their unknown destination.

26. *Painting June 1953.* Oil, 36in. x 28in.
27. *Painting July 1953.* Oil, 40in. x 36in. (coll: Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam)
28. *Painting December 1953.* Oil, 18in. x 36in.
29. *Painting January 1954.* Oil, 50in. x 40in.
30. *Painting February 1954.* Oil, 50in. x 40in. (coll: Robert Erskine)
31. *Painting February 1954.* Oil, 60in. x 50in.





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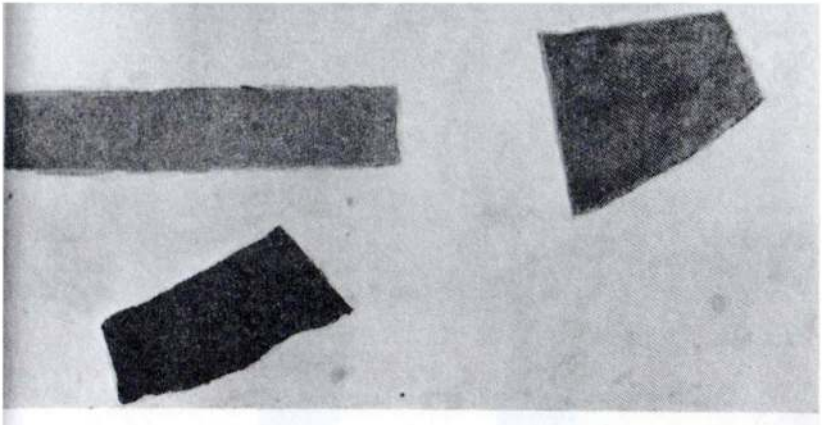

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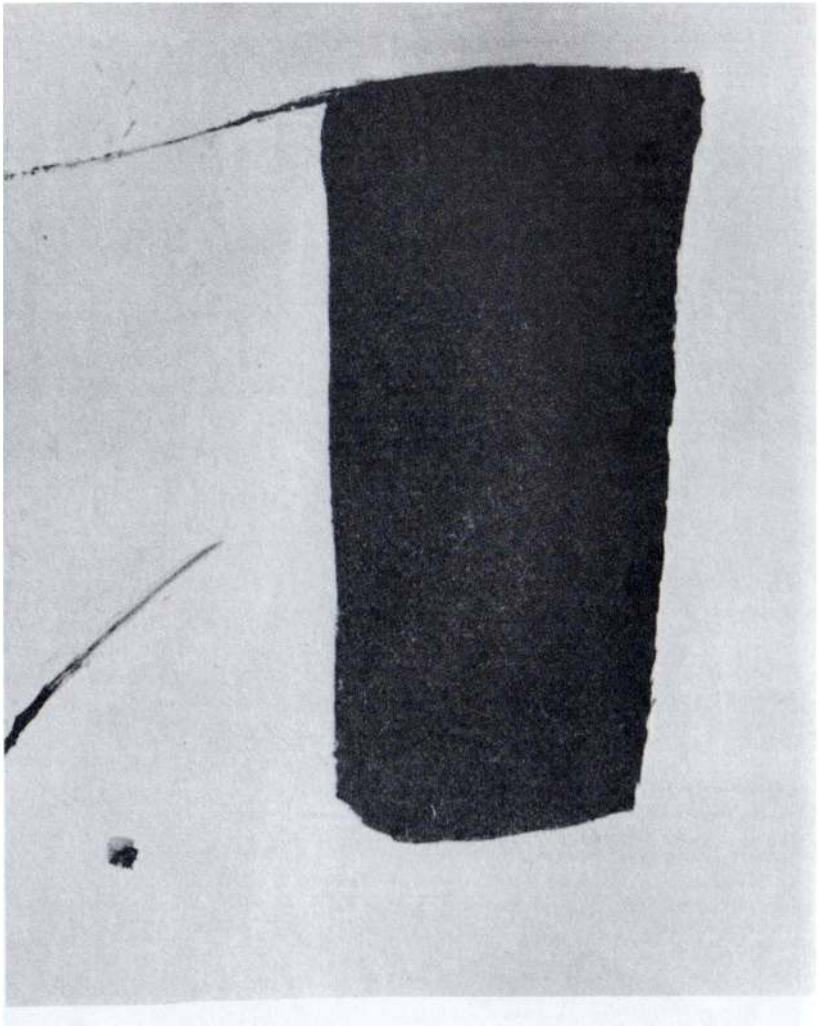

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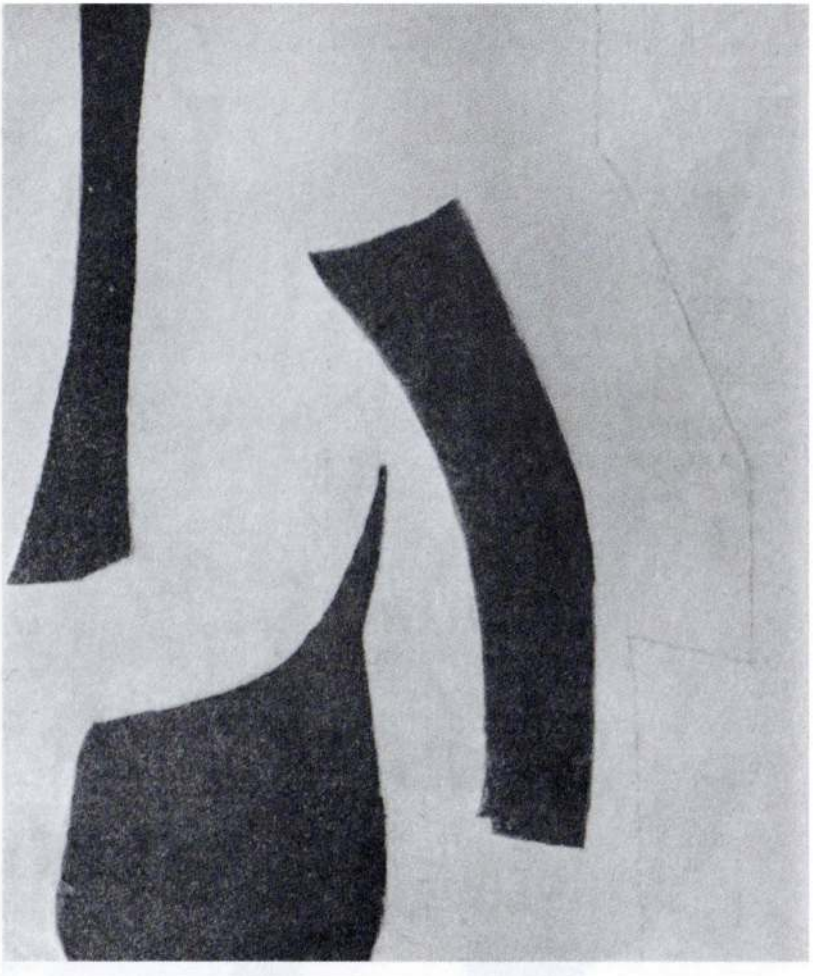


31

K E N N E T H M A R T I N

BORN SHEFFIELD, 1905. WHILE AT ROYAL COLLEGE OF ART (1929-1932) COPIED POUSSIN AND RUBENS AT NATIONAL GALLERY. WORKED DIRECT FROM NATURE EXCLUSIVELY UNTIL 1946. IN 1943 AND 1946 HELD EXHIBITIONS AT THE LEICESTER GALLERIES. AFTER 1946 WORK BECAME INCREASINGLY COMPOSED AND ABSTRACT. FIRST COMPLETELY ABSTRACT PAINTING 1949. WROTE ON ABSTRACT ART IN 'BROADSHEET No. 1' (1951). FIRST MOBILE IN 1951. NOTIONS OF MOVEMENT IN SPACE ALSO RESULTED IN VARIOUS PRINTS. WROTE 'AN ART OF ENVIRONMENT' FOR 'BROADSHEET No. 2' (1952) CONTAINING IDEAS WHICH FOUND EXPRESSION IN 'MOBILES IN A CHILDREN'S WARD' WHITTINGTON HOSPITAL 1953. EXHIBITION OF MOBILES WITH RELIEFS BY MARY MARTIN AT HEFFER GALLERY, CAMBRIDGE, 1954. EXHIBITED IN 'ARTIST VERSUS MACHINE' AT BUILDING CENTRE, 1954.

The work by the constructive or concrete artist is not an interpretation of forms he has seen and been carried away by, but an object itself, not representing any other object, and it is with this he seeks to indentify himself.

During this century a pictorial architecture has developed in which the work of art is arrived at through a process of becoming rather than through a process of abstracting. By one or a series of building processes works can be created capable of producing feeling in the beholder, not through illusion or allusion, but through direct visual action. These are not an imitation or a translation of the forms of nature, but nevertheless, like them, actually are ' diagrams of forces.'

The representational power of oil paint has become useless to the constructive artist who would therefore be limited in painting to the two-dimensional. And so the desire for a real tangible object leads him outwards into space.

Now if the realistic painter wants to produce figures in the round he has the traditions of carving and modelling at his service. But the constructive artist wishing to be architectural, to open the mass and to penetrate space, is faced with a different problem. For the line drawn on the plane becomes the line in space. The line drawn upon paper or canvas may be taut, but the line of wire balanced in space bends with its own weight, taking on a curve which is related to its own

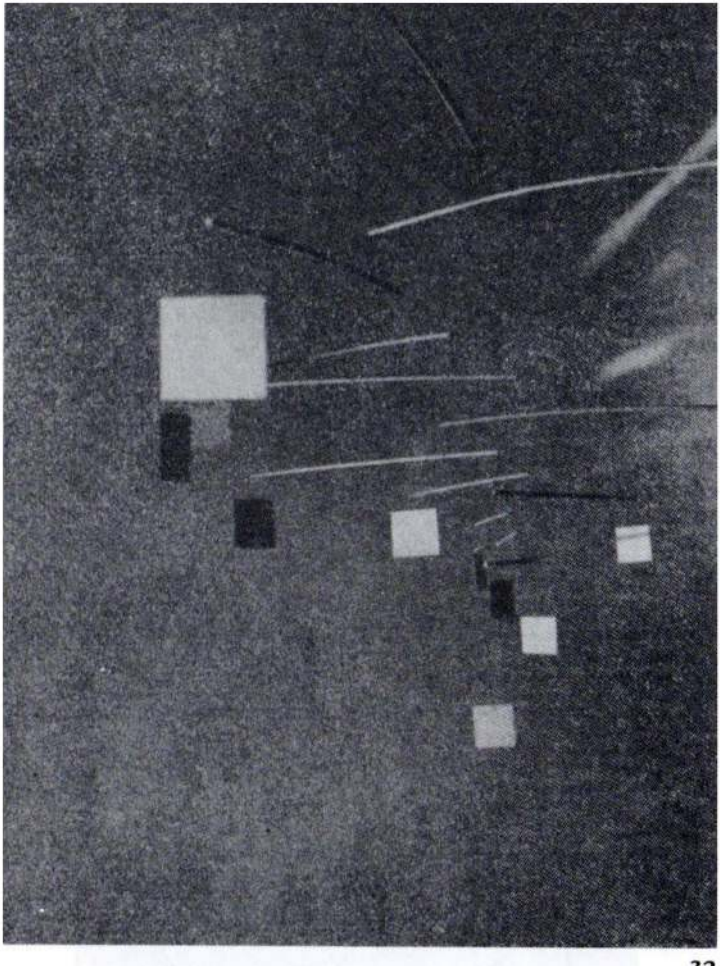
nature. Gravity has become a direct participant, and the artist is confronted by the characteristics of material in what is for him a new way.

Methods and materials present their challenge to the artist. He is stimulated by new materials and by new ways of working the old. The move of the cubists outwards from the surface of the canvas by means of papier collé and relief was the precursor of the movement into space and the interest of the constructionist in new materials and machine techniques.

For the new artist, therefore, there is an architectural way of the work growing which is parallel to the way the plant grows and, as with the plant, the work of art depends on the weight and structure of matter and its development in space. An example of this is the mobile whose symbols are physical entities. Heavy and light, solid and plane, play their part in its mechanism. Everything in the mobile, even the thickness of the paint, can effect its movement, so that it uses materials for their inherent properties and new materials of necessity.

The concept of the artist governs his choice of materials, the final form is qualified by their use. Constructive works obey their own structural laws as does the tree and by so doing have their own distinctive form, their own mechanism. The artist, whose creative will controls and explores these laws, strives to master techniques, delights in the discovery of fitting materials and uses the machine and its products in order to create environment and experience.

32. *Mobile 1951.* Tinned steel and dowel rods (coll: John Weeks)
33. *Line in Space 1951.* Nickel silver.
34. *Mobile Reflector, Red, Orange and White 1953.* Aluminium and steel.
35. *Mobile Reflector, Black, White, Brown and Gold 1952.* Aluminium and steel (coll: F. J. Woodford)
36. *Screw Mobile 1953.* Brass and steel.
37. *Mobile, Black and White 1953.* Steel and aluminium.



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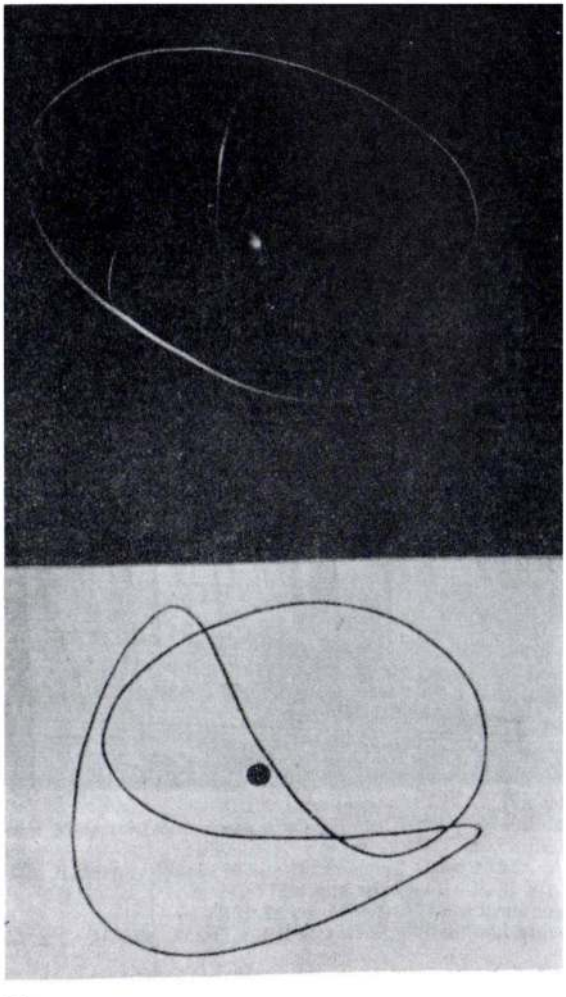

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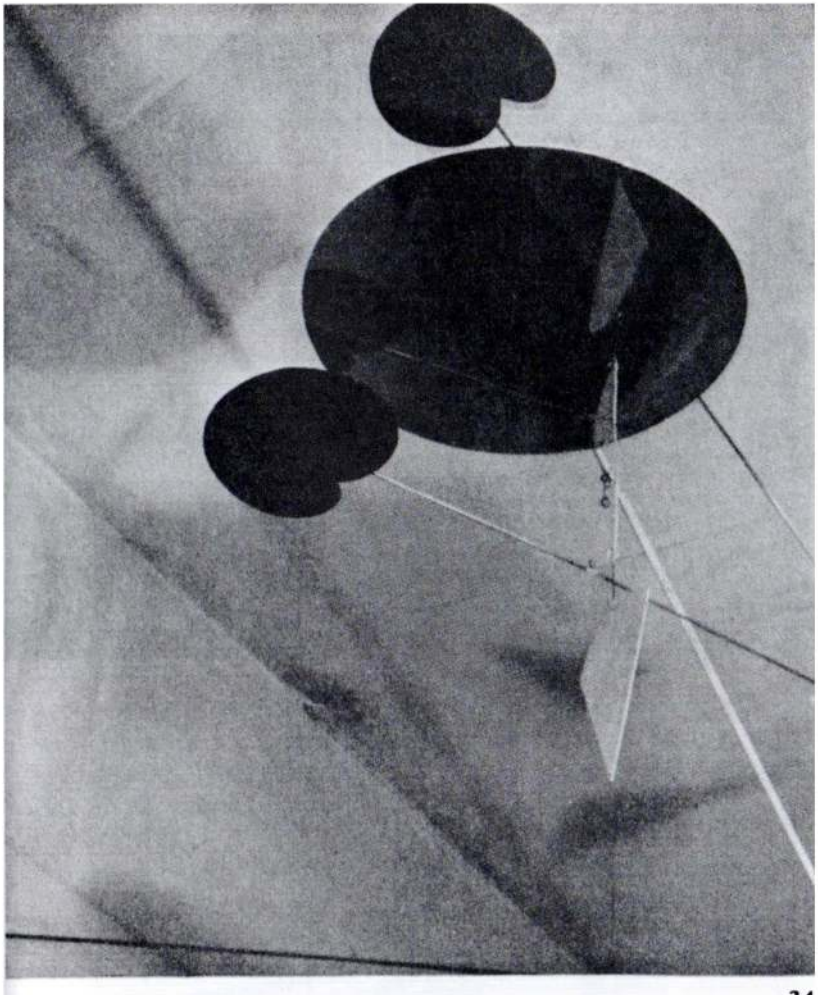

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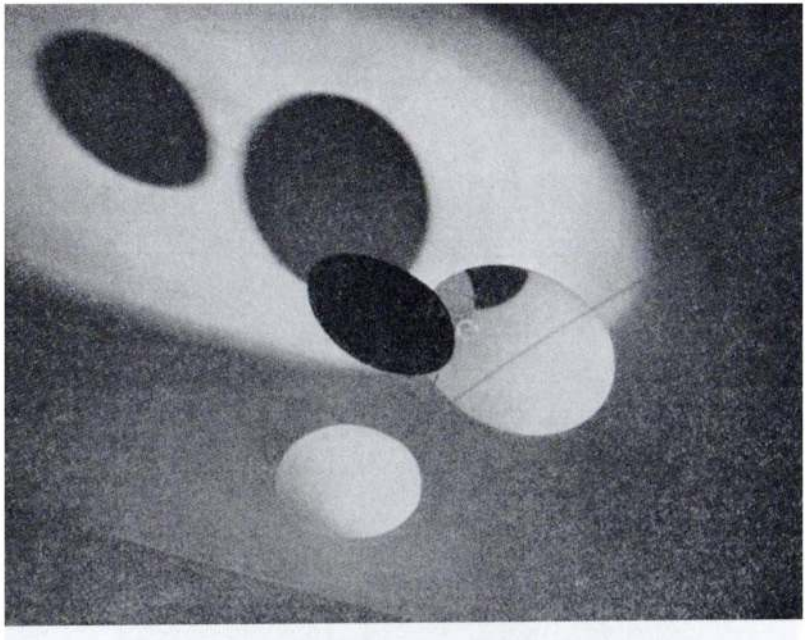

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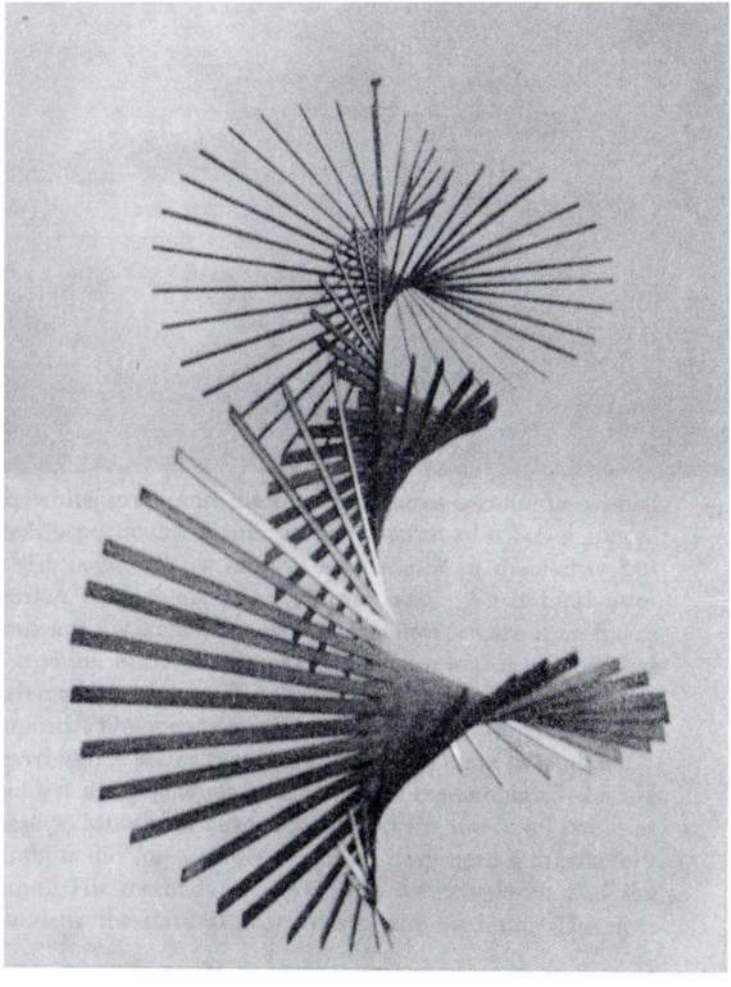
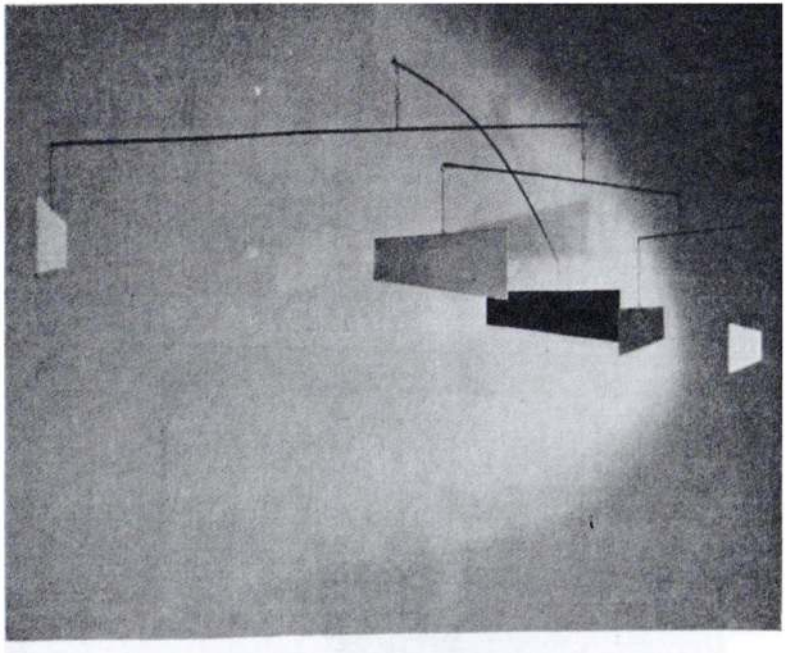




37

M A R Y M A R T I N

BORN AT FOLKSTONE, 1907. STUDIED AT GOLDSMITHS SCHOOL OF ART AND THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF ART. EXHIBITED AT THE LONDON GROUP AND ARTISTS' INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION. DURING THE WAR TAUGHT AT CHELMSFORD SCHOOL OF ART. FIRST ABSTRACT PAINTING 1950. FIRST RELIEFS 1951. EXHIBITED AT GIMPEL FILS; 'ABSTRACT ART,' A.I.A. GALLERY 1951; THE LONDON GROUP; 'MODERN TRENDS IN BRITISH SCULPTURE' AT HEFFER GALLERY, CAMBRIDGE 1953; 22 FITZROY STREET; 'ARTIST VERSUS MACHINE' AT BUILDING CENTRE 1954; FIRST EXHIBITION OF RELIEFS AT HEFFER GALLERY, CAMBRIDGE 1954 WITH KENNETH MARTIN'S MOBILES.

Most of the developments of modern art were anticipated by the Cubists. One of these was the limitation of colour. This has been done by painters as well as constructionists. In the first place the step is usually taken because colour arouses such strong natural associations in the spectator's mind: grass, sky, fire, water, light, darkness, death. It is necessary to say that the limitation of such an instant means of communication is a step taken with great reluctance on the part of the artist, and therefore it is worth one's while to enquire into the reason why it is done and what the artist gets and gives in its place.

Mondrian said that he would restrict himself to the use of black, white, grey, and the three primaries because he wished to abolish particular forms 'in the interest of a larger unity.' All these colours have natural associations in themselves but Mondrian used them in an abstract way. No natural associations are awakened for us. The yellow square may fill us with emotion but it is still a yellow square and the colour has no reference except to the shape it expresses. The artist has triumphed. The means of art express art. A pure art has been achieved and it seems that there is nothing more to be done.

And yet art begets art. Although he contemplated the use of plastics, Mondrian never abandoned the use of oil paint, as the Cubists did for a time. It cannot have been a satisfactory medium. His methods of work were constructionist and the results deny the natural properties of the medium. The next

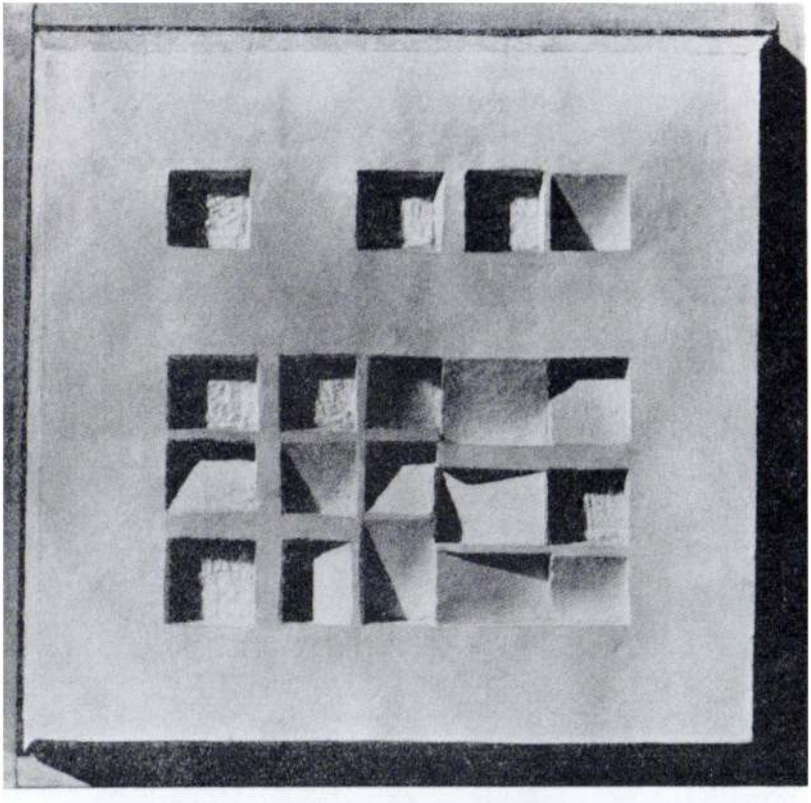
step would imply true construction, which brings us face to face with another reason for the limitation of colour. This is the dominance of sculpture in the plastic arts of today.

Sculpture, in its purest form, makes its own colour, and is independent of the tricks of painting. When oil painting began its period of domination, the sculptors of the Renaissance coloured their work realistically and even imitated the flat science of perspective in their reliefs. One cannot have everything in sculpture and the polychrome Ghiberti is aesthetically pale beside a Gothic capital carved by an unknown hand.

Today the pendulum is swinging back. A public, which has been taught to treat oil-painting with a reverence bred in the sanctity of museums and the financial intimidation of sale rooms, still cannot understand that it is merely a means of self-expression on the part of the artist. If it cannot express what the artist wishes to say, another medium must be found. Encountering this problem, the Cubists invented 'sculpto-painting,' a mingling of the two arts, which comes dangerously near to polychrome sculpture.

Since sculpture has been freed from the old ideas of volume and mass and realistic content, it would appear to contain possibilities of development for the painter which avoid the Renaissance error. Transparent sculpture, space-time movement and new materials present new problems of colour. Simple colours are being used but, if colour is developed in a more complicated way, the forms will necessarily change.

38. *Columbarium 1951.* Plaster, 8in. x 8in.
39. *Grey Relief 1952.* Balsa wood, 24in. x 24in.
40. *Spiral Movement 1954.* Plywood, 24in. x 24in.
41. *Spiral Movement 1951.* Weyroc, 18in. x 18in.
42. *Climbing Form 1954.* Plywood, 22in. x 12¾in.
43. *Climbing Form 1953.* Plywood, 32in. x 20in.



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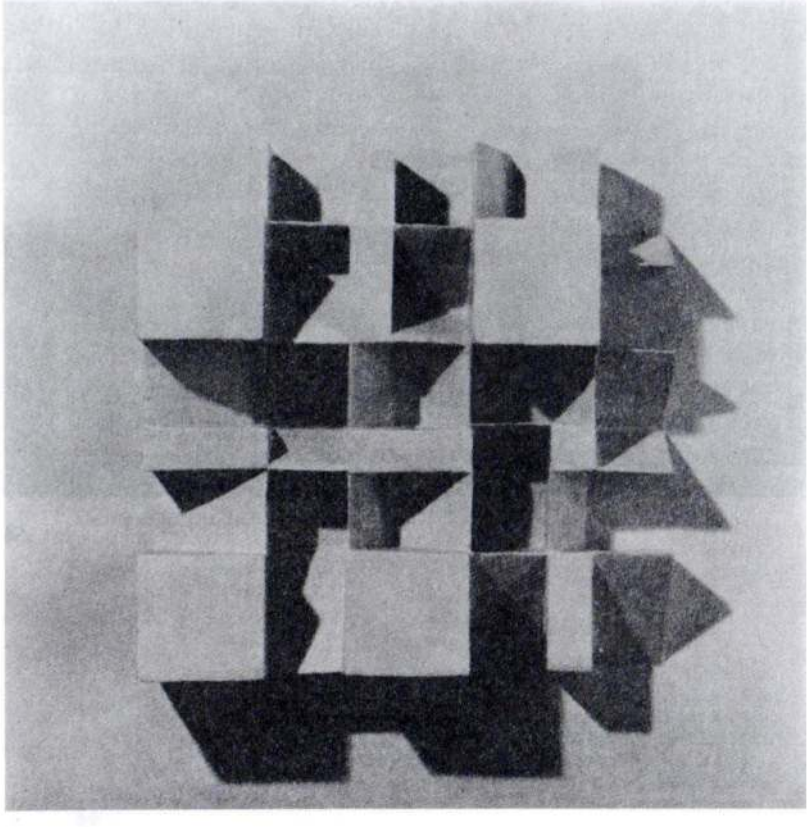

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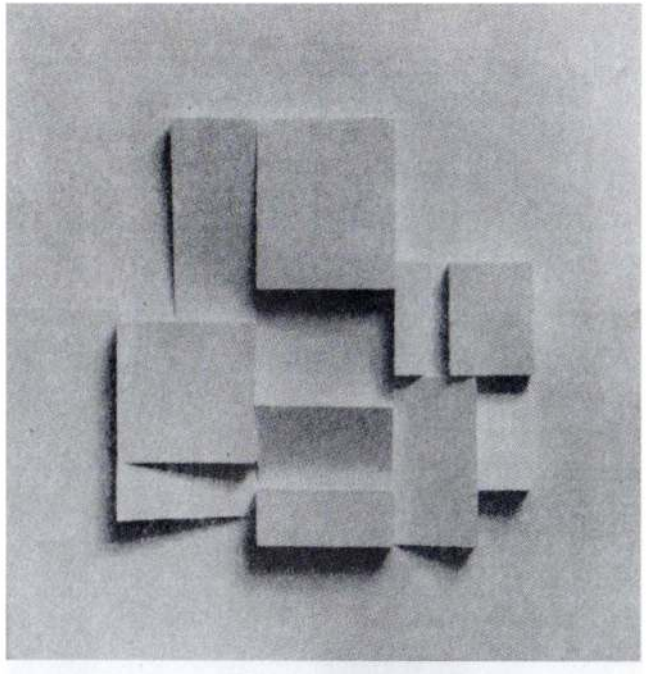

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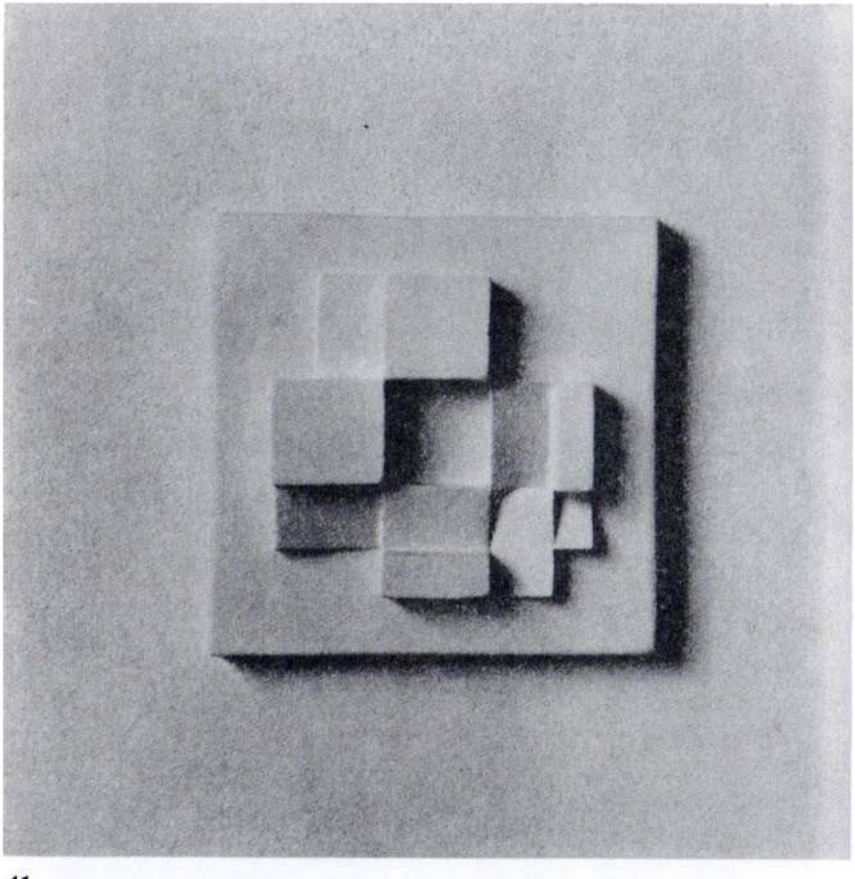

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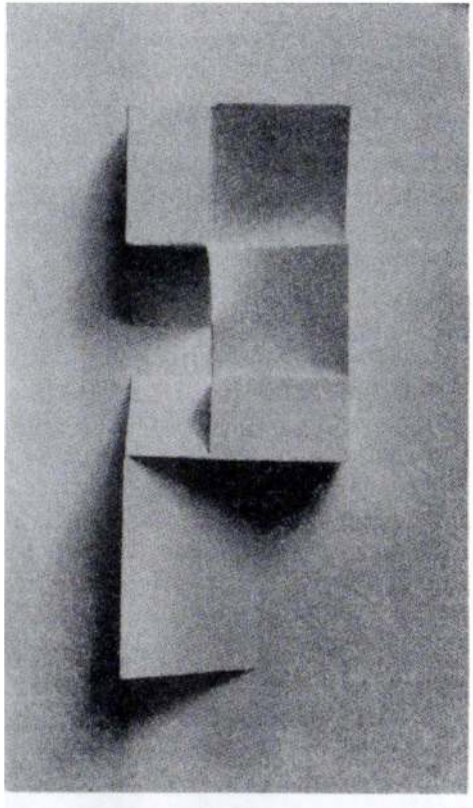

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43

VICTOR PASMORE

BORN 1908 IN CHELSHAM, SURREY, SETTLED IN LONDON 1927. WORKED IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT SERVICE 1927-1937. STUDIED ART PRIVATELY AND AT EVENING SCHOOLS. JOINED THE LONDON ARTISTS' ASSOCIATION 1931 AND THE LONDON GROUP 1932. ASSOCIATED WITH THE 'OBJECTIVE ABSTRACTION' EXHIBITION AT ZWEMMER GALLERY 1932, AND THE FORMATION OF THE EUSTON ROAD SCHOOL 1937. ASSOCIATED WITH THE EXHIBITIONS OF ABSTRACT ART AT THE A.I.A. GALLERY AND 22 FITZROY STREET 1951-1953 AND THE 'ARTIST VERSUS MACHINE' EXHIBITION AT THE BUILDING CENTRE 1954. RETROSPECTIVE EXHIBITION 1944-1954 AT THE INSTITUTE OF CONTEMPORARY ART 1954. APPOINTED MASTER OF PAINTING, DURHAM UNIVERSITY, 1954.

In modern art the idea of imitating the experience of beauty gives way to that of creating and constructing it. An old maxim says, 'art is the mirror of nature.' But one must not construe this only in a superficial sense. There is a deeper meaning—art imitates nature in its manner of operation. The quest for beauty now, therefore, is not one of finding something static and finite which can be copied, but of attaining the necessary processes and conditions which will give it birth.

By affirming the plastic qualities of shape, line, tone, and colour as capable of free development, painting and sculpture have laid the foundations for this approach. Because of its descriptive powers painting has inevitably associated itself with literature. But the awareness that colour and shape express something in themselves has now enabled the artist to develop along lines analogous to music.

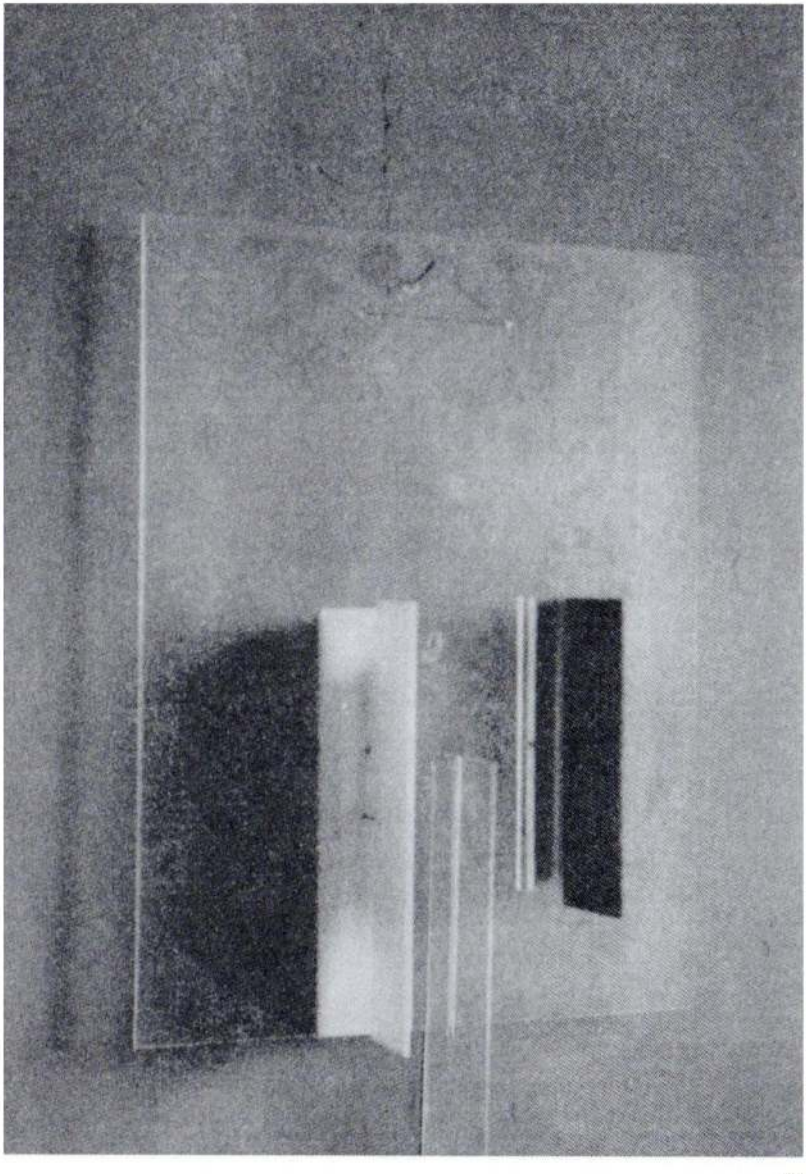
That this development would ultimately involve a break from the methods of representational art was inevitable. Nevertheless, the new painting began as an abstract of visual experience. It carried impressionism and expressionism, cubism and fauvism to their abstract and subjective limits. The objects of perception, denuded of their particular content, were transformed and reconstructed. But this process of strengthening the plastic qualities of painting at the expense of the experience on which they were based, eventually created a discrepancy which weakened the relation between the two

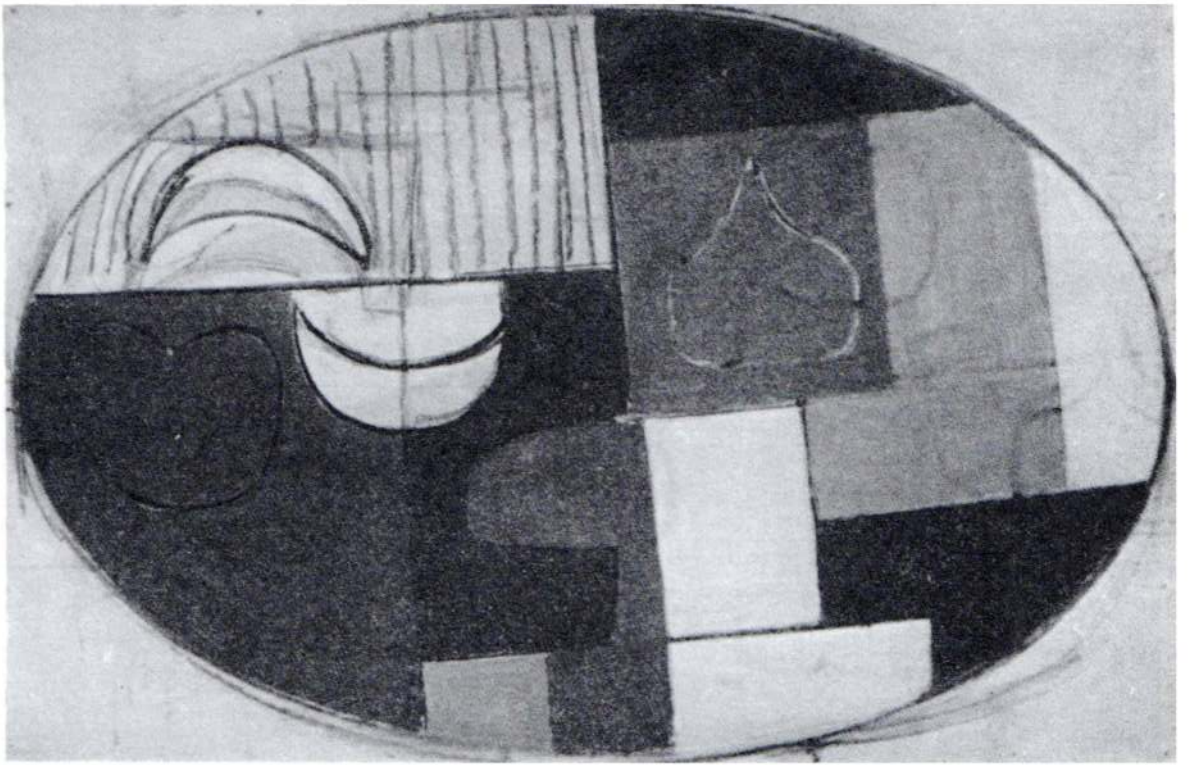
factors. A complete break was necessary before an objective basis could be re-established.

The development of pure form in painting and sculpture, therefore, involves clear distinctions from its representational counterpart, the chief of which concerns the relationship between the form and substance of the work, on the one hand, and the actual space and environment which it occupies, on the other. Like literature, representational form functions partly in an imaginative capacity. That is to say, it refers to forms other than its own : it is a mental construct whose relation to actual space is ambiguous. But pure form refers to no other object. It is a reality, logical and sufficient in itself—a function of the intellect rather than a description of it : as such, its relations with space are real and organic.

Nevertheless, the idea of pure painting involves certain limitations which prevent it from attaining this relationship in full; it is two-dimensional (in painting, a third dimension can be obtained only by illusion). Consequently a discrepancy arises between the dimensions of space and those of painting which renders an organic spatial relationship incomplete. In terms of pure form, therefore, painting falls short of the means of attaining full realisation. If the artist wishes to seek development, he must do so in actual dimensions. In pure form, it is sculpture which really becomes supreme.

44. *Rectangular Motif: Black, White and Biscuit No. 1* (transparent relief) 1953. Perspex, 20in. x 16in.
45. *Oval Motif: Brown, White, Pink and Ochre 1952.* Oil, 30in. x 20in.
46. *Oval Motif: Brown, White, Maroon and Ochre 1951.* Oil, 20in. x 16in.
47. *Rectangular Motif: Black, White and Maroon No. 2* (transparent relief) 1954. Perspex, 20in. x 16in.
48. *Relief in White, Black, Red and Yellow 1953.* Plywood and plastic.
49. *Rectangular Motif: Black, White and Biscuit Mobile 1954.* Wire and balsa.
50. *Square Motif in Black, White and Maroon, Relief 1952.* Plywood and plastic.





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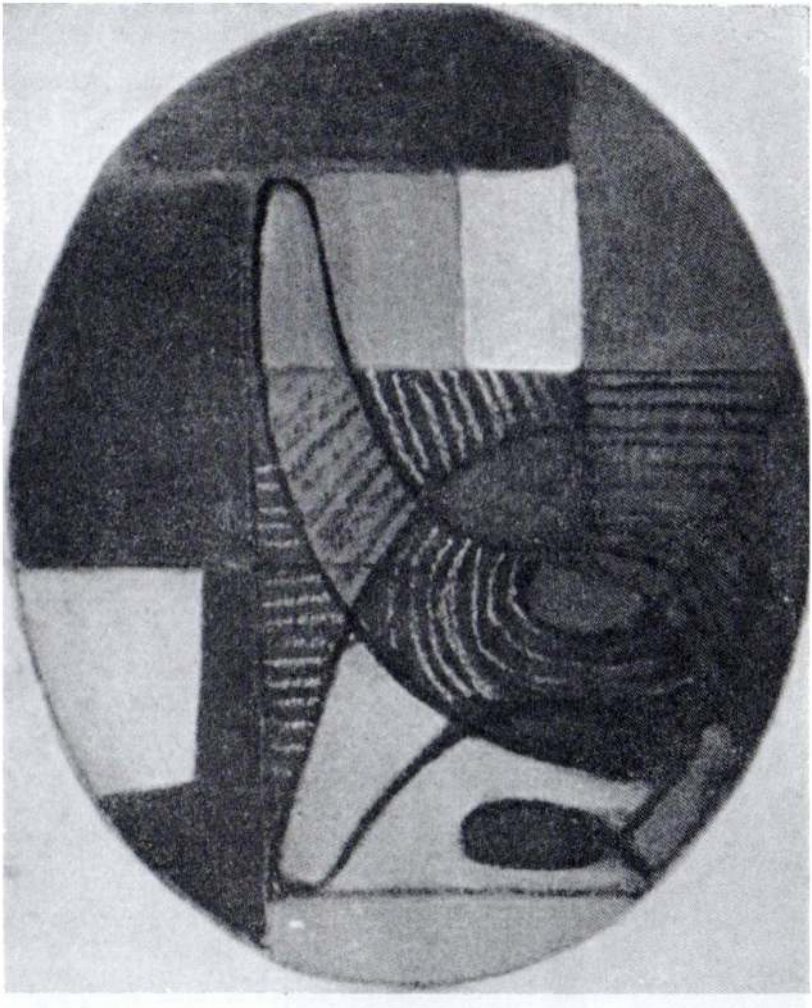

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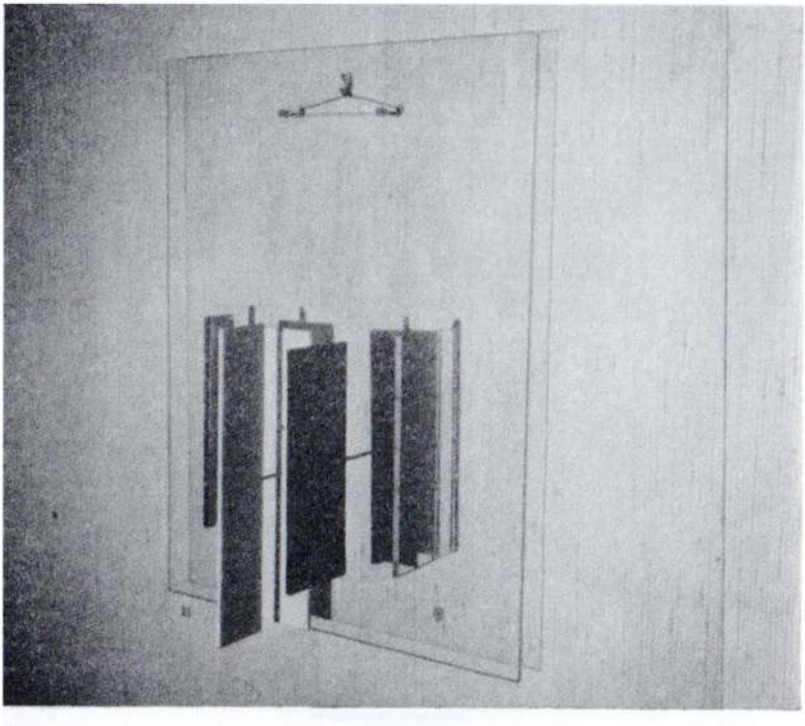

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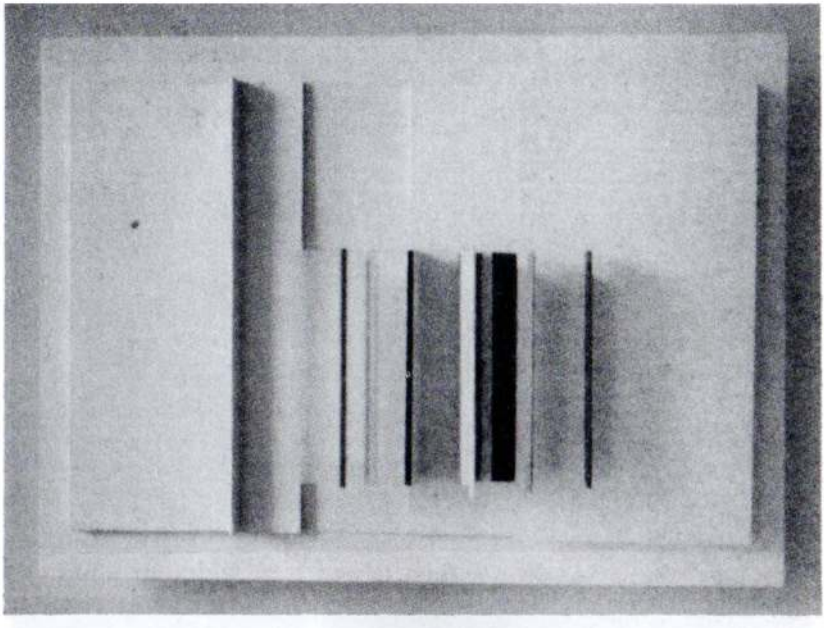

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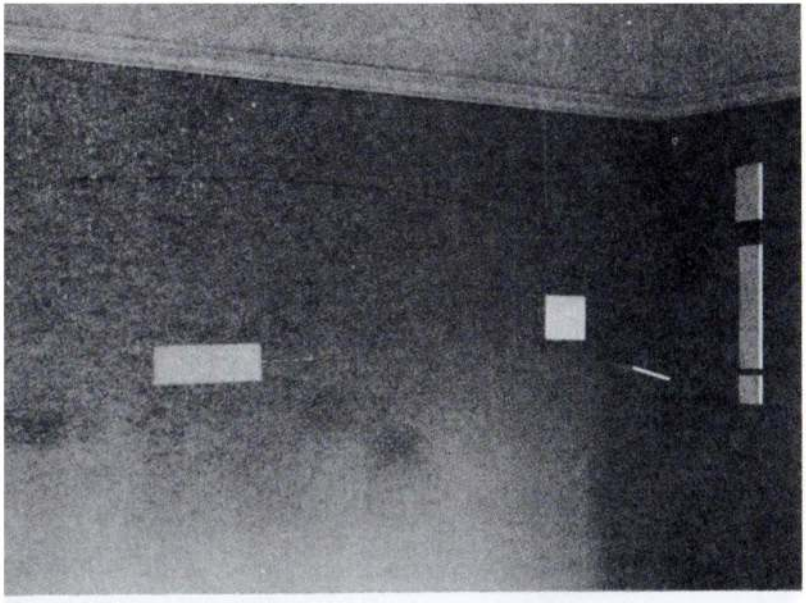

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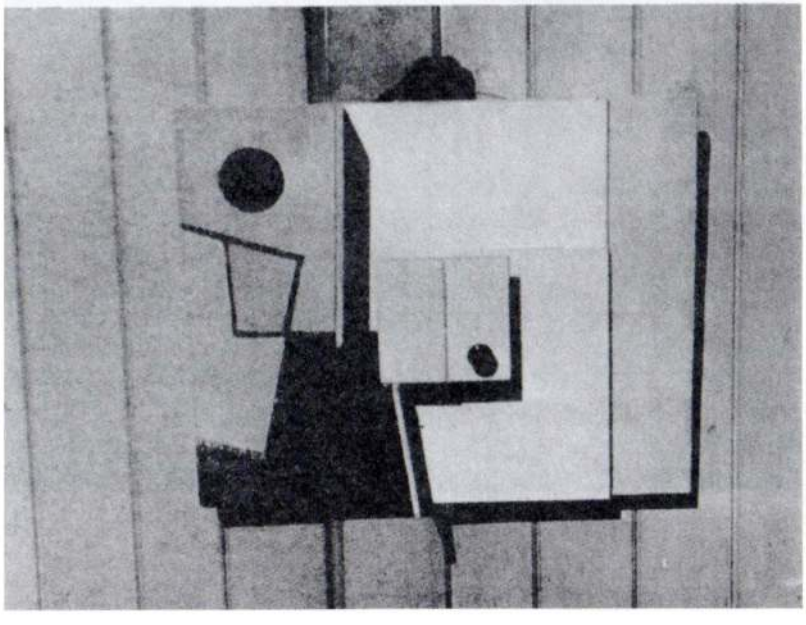

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W I L L I A M S C O T T

BORN 1913 IN GREENOCK. STUDIED AT BELFAST COLLEGE OF ART AND AT ROYAL ACADEMY SCHOOLS, WHERE HE WON A SILVER MEDAL FOR SCULPTURE, BECAME LANDSEER SCHOLAR IN PAINTING AND WAS AWARDED A LEVERHULME SCHOLARSHIP. 1937-1939 TRAVELLED IN ITALY AND FRANCE. ONE-MAN SHOWS 1942, 1948, 1950. WORK IN MANY PUBLIC COLLECTIONS INCLUDING GALLERIES IN U.S.A., CANADA· AUSTRALIA, SWEDEN.

How do you begin your work ?

Every painting I do is related to the last one : it may be a continuation of a previous painting or it may be a reaction against it. When I grow tired of grey I long for colour so I use colour. The forms I use are the forms I see about me and the forms I have dreamt about since I was a child.

I was brought up in a grey world, an austere world : the garden I knew was a cemetery and we had no fine furniture. The objects I painted were the symbols of the life I knew best and the pictures which looked most like mine were painted on walls a thousand years ago. I may begin a picture as a careful recording of a special sensation evoked clearly at a remembered time and place and by a continuous process of work, obliteration, change, an expression of an entirely different thing grows, a ' figure into landscape ' or into a still life, ' a man into a woman.' I have no theory. I am not concerned only with ' space construction.' What matters to me in a picture is the ' indefinable.'

I feel constricted if I become too much aware of the act of making. Liberty is lost and instead of an instinctive lyrical expression the whole thing becomes arid.

I am an abstract artist in the sense that I abstract. I cannot be called non-figurative while I am still interested in the modern magic of space, primitive sex forms, the sensual and erotic, disconcerting contours, the things of life.

How do you find titles for your work ?

My titles are often only a personal means of identity. Usually

I find them by the derivation of my forms, which may come from in still life, table tops, harbours, hills, etc. The true title is the interpretation placed on them by the spectator.

Is there a decisive difference in your opinion between pre-war and post-war non-figurative art ?

Recent painting in Europe and America differs from pre-war abstract painting in that it has become liberated from too rigid dogmas. It is difficult to find a school or group but undoubtedly there are artists with individual forms of expression which cannot be exactly compared to anything before the war. More personal, more expressionistic, organic, the image is there but remains obscure.

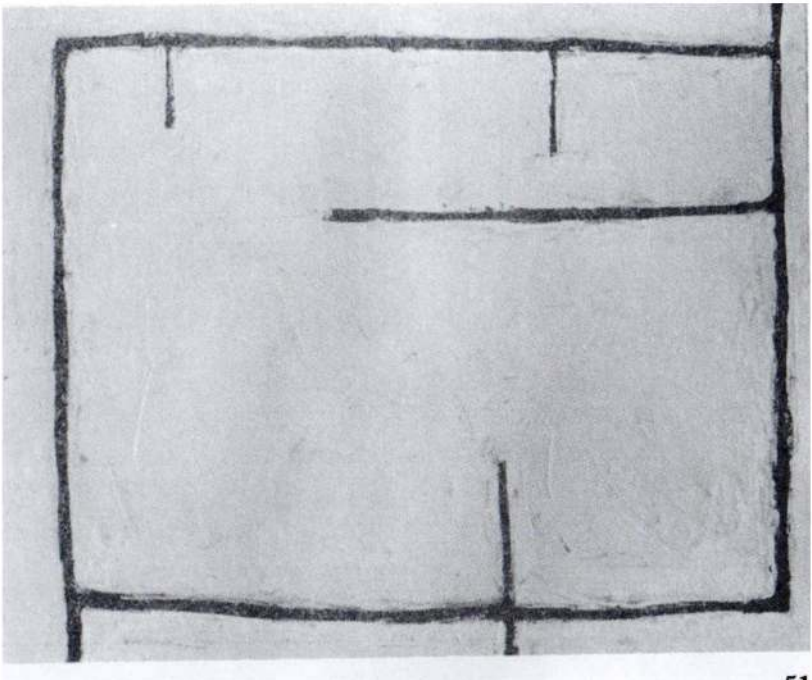
Is ' primitive ' art significant to you ?

Primitive sculpture has a particular meaning for me when it possesses strong sensual and plastic qualities.

Do you use drawings in the preparation of your paintings ?

When I make drawings they are not made as visual data for a specific painting. But for my paintings in the plural. I draw to shock myself out of a too easy rhythm—I may begin with no conception whatever, an image merges (almost always an image that I am obsessed with). I rub it out and begin again, searching for its counterpart. When it appears I invariably find that the thing I draw is at my elbow, it is out of the window, or has been standing at my front door for a long time.

51. *Figure into Landscape 1954.* 20in. x 20in. (coll: Martha Jackson Gallery)
52. *Grey, Black, and White Forms 1953.* 45in. x 60in. (coll: Martha Jackson Gallery)
53. *Ochre, Black, and White Landscape 1953.* 20in. x 24in. (coll: Hanover Gallery)
54. *Yellow and Black Composition 1953.* 50in. x 40in. (coll: Guggenheim Collection)
55. *Black and White Forms 1952.* 36in. x 29in. (coll: Martha Jackson Gallery)
56. *Black and White Composition 1954.* 44in. x 34in. (coll: Martha Jackson Gallery)



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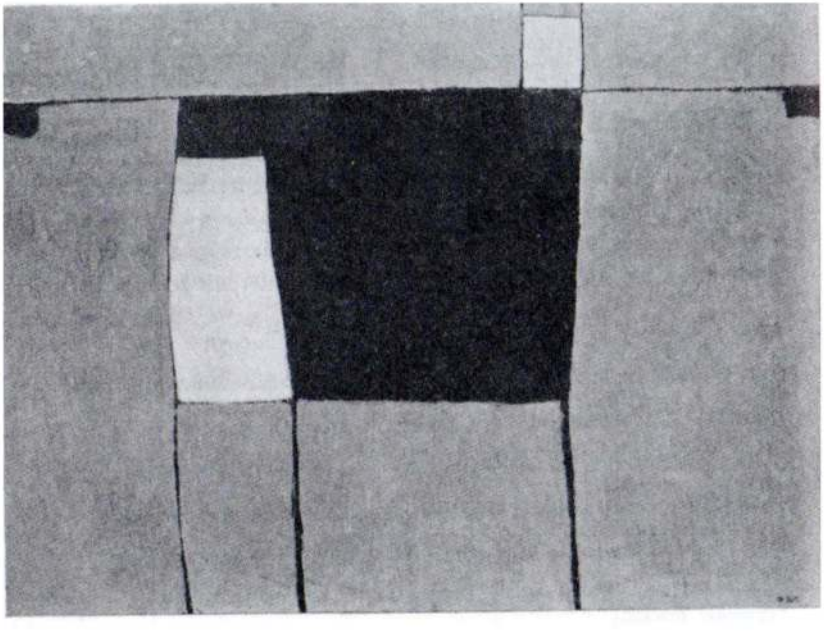

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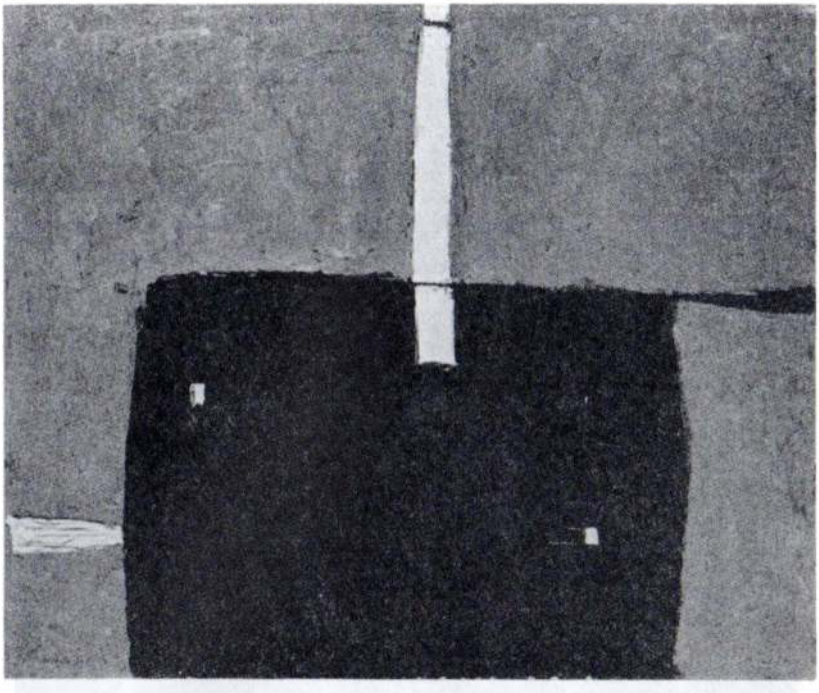

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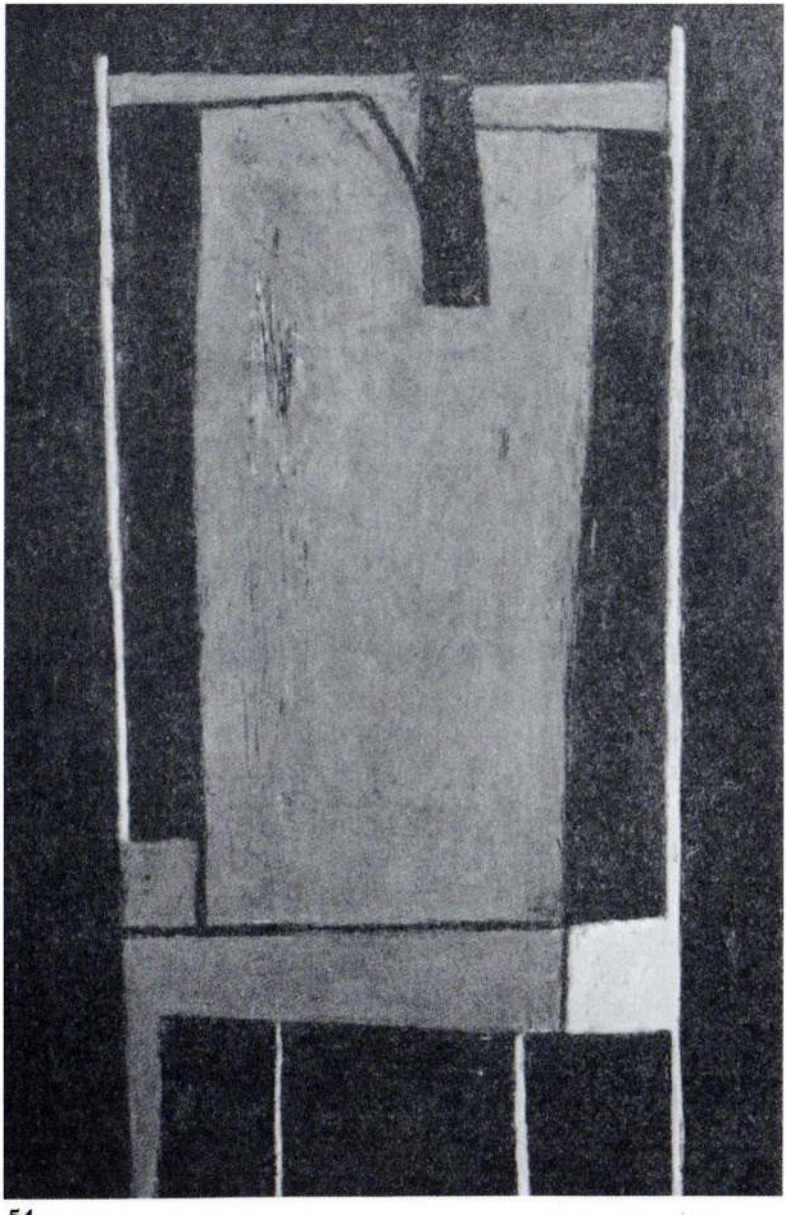

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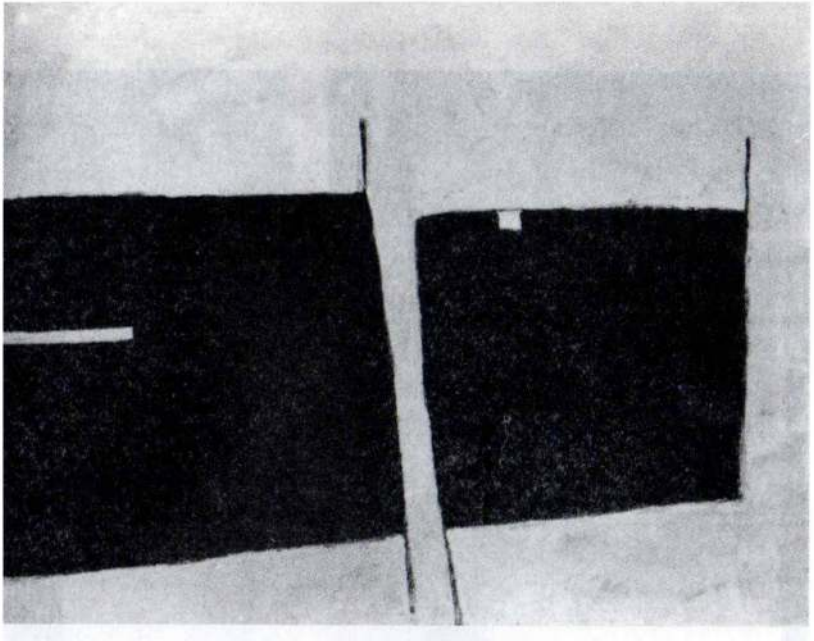

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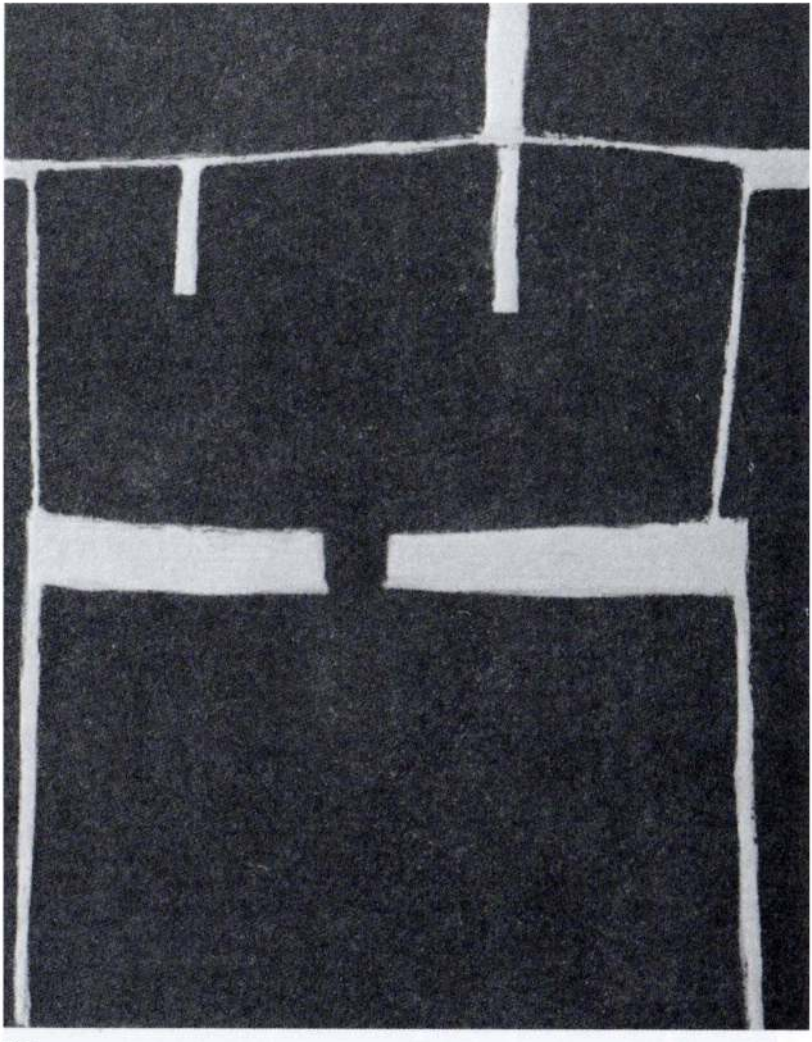

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